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ONCE more, Kishan Rana will delight as well as instruct his growing following on diplomatic training courses throughout the world. This is a truly impressive work of fluent, lively, comprehensive, in parts original, and above all sage. It deserves a wide readership and will without doubt get one.

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University of Leicester, UK

...probably Rana's best book on diplomacy. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Ambassador is an incisive study, based on the experience of a long and distinguished career in the Indian diplomatic service and many insights from the literature on diplomacy. The book is highly recommended to practitioners, as many countries are nowadays thinking hard about how to make the best of their network of overseas missions in a rapidly changing international environment... a very stimulating contribution to the field.

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S.K. Singh, former Indian Foreign Secretary

Kishan S. Rana served as India's Ambassador and High Commissioner to Algeria, Czechoslovakia, Kenya, Mauritius, and Germany; and as Consul General in San Francisco. He spent one year on Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Staff. Previous books: *Inside Diplomacy* (Manas, New Delhi, 2002), and *Bilateral Diplomacy* (Diplo, Malta, 2002).

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# THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AMBASSADOR

PLENIPOENTIARY TO CHIEF EXECUTIVE

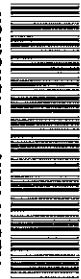
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*Inside Diplomacy*, Manas Publications, New Delhi, 2000 (revised paperback edition, 2002)

*Managing Corporate Culture: Leveraging Diversity to give India a Global Competitive Edge* (with Karl Ulrich and R.S. Chaudhry), Macmillan India, New Delhi, 2000

*Bilateral Diplomacy*, DiploFoundation, Malta, 2002 (Indian edition, Manas Publications, New Delhi, 2002)

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Ambassador  
Plenipotentiary to Chief Executive

Kishan S. Rana



DiploFoundation  
Malta and Geneva

2004

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This book began as an idea at the end of 2000, suggested by Professor G.R. Berridge, acclaimed teacher of diplomacy and kind friend, while I was in Windhoek, on a six-month Commonwealth assignment advising the Namibian Foreign Ministry. The impressions of Africa gathered during that period (and those accumulated during four previous assignments in different parts of that continent), reinforced my experience of the Indian diplomatic system, that while developing countries have learnt well the forms of international discourse, they have had less success in fully harnessing the diplomatic process in the pursuit of their national interests. Published material on the operation of diplomatic services in developing countries is relatively scarce, and the same is true of comparative studies on foreign ministries. Nor are there many internal studies in these states looking to the best practices of others, or attempts to benchmark against them.

Over the past three years, I conducted 40 interviews while collecting data for the book. Among the interviewees, 29 were ambassadors, serving and former, four were diplomats of other rank, and seven were from outside the profession, belonging to the international affairs community. They came from 16 countries around the world. Information collected in the course of other concurrent studies, including a survey of the diplomatic process in Asian and some other countries, was of considerable help. I am very grateful to all of them,

for generously offering their experiences and insights, which provided vital direction for this work.

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KISHAN S. RANA

## ABBREVIATIONS

APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
BIMST-EC	Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation (Bhutan and Nepal have also joined this group)
Caricom	Caribbean Community (comprising 16 member-countries, mainly small island states).
Cd'A	chargé d'affaires
CEO	chief executive officer
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy (of the EU)
DCM	deputy chief of mission
ECOWAS	Economic Cooperation for West African States agreement
EP groups	eminent person groups
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FTA	free trade agreement
GATT	General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ILO	International Labor Office
IR theory	international relations theory

IT	information technology
MFA	foreign ministry
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NODIS	no distribution (a classification used in the US for cipher messages that have limited distribution)
NGO	non-governmental organization
OAU	Organization of the African Union (formerly Organization of African Unity)
PR	permanent representative
SAARC	South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Agreement
WTO	World Trade Organization

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2003, Thailand announced a 'CEO ambassador policy' as part of the reform of the public sector, under which Thai ambassadors were to '... act as chief executive officers in their assigned countries, taking a strong lead to promote Thailand overseas both politically and economically, with representatives of other agencies serving as members of the team's executive board. They are also expected to be the persons to be held accountable in the first place for the implementation of the Government's strategies abroad'.<sup>1</sup> A pilot project was implemented in April involving the Thai ambassadors to the US, Japan, Belgium, China, India and Laos; later the Thai Foreign Ministry decided to progressively convert all its ambassadors to CEO-style management. This is but one instance of the application of business management concepts and methods to diplomacy, which can be identified as one of the defining changes of our times.<sup>2</sup>

Resident ambassadors and their embassy teams represent the cutting edge of the diplomatic system. The paradigm change in international affairs since the end of the Cold War, evolving globalization, and the 'internalization' of external policy that most countries have witnessed, not only compel an adaptation in foreign policy, but also in the process through which that policy is implemented. This book examines the ambassador as an institution, and considers the ways in which his functioning can be optimized.

### Evolution

The *Arthashastra*, composed by Kautilya (also known as Chanakya) around 300 BC, was handed down in an oral tradition as a comprehensive treatise on statecraft.<sup>3</sup> Kautilya is credited with helping Chandragupta Maurya to win the throne of Magadha, in the heart of the Gangetic plain. Some have doubted if it is Kautilya's work, suggesting that it may have been composed a few centuries later, in the version known to us. More relevant for our purpose is the context: a time of warring states, a checkerboard of shifting alliances and rivalries, demanding high governance skills, in strategy and tactics. Describing the attributes of good kingship, including the maintenance of law and order, an efficient administration, and economic policy to sustain prosperity, the treatise also covers relations between states, and the dispatch of emissaries. This makes it one of the oldest documents on the work of envoys, sent by one king to another, for negotiation, observation, the procurement of materials, the release of hostages and other missions.

It is clear from the *Arthashastra* and other evidence that the institution of the resident envoy was yet to be invented, but situations of a relatively lengthy stay of envoys in foreign courts were well known. Kautilya's advice was pragmatic, founded on *realpolitik*. The envoy's tasks were to send information to his king, 'uphold the king's honor', acquire allies for him, and 'instigate dissension among the friends of the enemy'. On presenting himself to the other king, he was to deliver the message exactly as it was 'given to him, even if he apprehends danger to his life'.<sup>4</sup> The assumption was that adversarial relations existed among kingdoms, as well as the absence of an overarching system of mutual accommodation or of a dominant empire that enforced peace. But the short references to envoys are studded with practical advice, that envoys should not let honors go to their head, avoid women and liquor, and 'sleep alone'.

The practice of sending permanent envoys to other states began in medieval Italy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and by the time of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, it became customary in much of Europe. But even prior to this, the institution of the resident consul was known in the Mediterranean. The first comprehensive study

of the real work of the envoy is by the Dutch diplomat and scholar Abraham de Wicquefort, whose book *The Ambassador and his Functions*, published in 1681, was translated into English by John Digby in 1716.<sup>5</sup> Since then, the resident ambassador has been the theme of many works, some listed in the bibliography.

In historical evolution, resident ambassadors preceded the institution of the foreign ministry by a couple of centuries. It was in Paris that a dedicated agency of the government was created in 1626 to manage the system of envoys based abroad. The other classic functions of the foreign ministry came later. While the modern foreign ministry serves several functions that are not directly related to the network of envoys based abroad, it is this network that is its *raison d'être*. This ministry and the embassies it supervises constitute the intertwined diplomatic system.

### The Diplomatic Process and Developing Countries

The foreign policy of a state depends on its attributes, its capacity to engage in relations with other countries, and its international goals. The tools and technique through which different countries implement their foreign policy are for the great part similar, almost identical. Thus, there exists a 'diplomatic process' that is shared between countries, with a methodology routinely practiced by the diplomatic services of different states. Of course, there is potential in the system for change and innovation as well, but most of these are transportable, capable of emulation and adaptation. This makes comparative diplomatic studies rather interesting.

I am indebted to Canadian scholar Justin Robertson<sup>6</sup> for the realization that foreign ministries and diplomatic services in developing countries—and by the same token, those in the transition states as well—are not traditionally seen as potential recipients for assistance in 'capacity building'. And yet, in point of fact, they have the same requirement to be assisted in building up their organizations and methods, as also their human resources, as the other institutions of governance working in domestic affairs, to which external donors and international organizations provide considerable technical and other assistance. The obvious reason is, of course, that a country's

diplomatic institutions constitute the very mechanism through which international communication takes place, and it is indiscreet for donors to advise that the diplomatic institutions need upgrading or improvement. It is even harder for the recipient states to seek this foreign assistance, even when they realize the need for this. We are then left with self-improvement as a viable model for carrying out change.

There is another way of looking at the diplomatic process. Ensuring that the country has the best possible mechanism for advancing its external interests is a 'public good', and a factor of basic good governance. It does not suffice that a country should have a foreign policy that best serves its interests. It must also have the optimal ground mechanism to implement this policy and to build and operate the external relationships that best serve its interests. This is a complicated way of saying that the process is almost as important as the policy. Yet, in our discussions of national affairs in different countries, how little attention is devoted to process issues?

The diplomatic system works as a delivery mechanism of foreign policy, the process through which a country's external policy is implemented. It may appear as a one-way relationship, with policy driving the process, but since the diplomatic machine delivers the responses and assessments that become policy determinants, this feedback loop interrelates the two. Moreover, in the real world, the implementation of policy often becomes part of policy itself. Thus, policy and process are intertwined, virtually inseparable.

When we examine the diplomatic process, it is easy to see the importance of the institution of the ambassador, in bilateral and multilateral roles, as a central element of the entire diplomatic system. With the foreign ministry functioning as the core or hub, the ambassador and the team he or she heads at the embassy are the field units, each vitally dependent on the other. This study examines the contemporary role and the future of the ambassador, as a component of the international system.

The principal thesis of this book is that today there is a greater functional necessity for the resident ambassador than at any previous time, since Italy launched this innovative institution in the 15<sup>th</sup>

century. Some may view this with skepticism, accustomed as they may be to a refrain that ambassadors are marginalized by technology and instant communications. Moreover, critics might add that a direct dialogue between principals even bypasses foreign ministries, and that the technicalities of international discourse also makes the generalist envoy rather irrelevant, or of secondary value, at best.

True, the operational ethos of international relations has been transformed over the years. The ambassador is today seldom a contributor in the determination of war and peace between states, though he still has a role to play in the reduction of tensions, often at multilateral instances where his country may have only an indirect interest. There are other elements to be taken into account.

The central tasks of the ambassador are less dramatic, and even less obvious—the advancement of his country's interests in a world of complex interdependence, where issues in the external dialogue are interwoven. In the entire government machinery, he is the one who has the best overview, in real time, of the current shape and content of the bilateral relationship entrusted to his charge. This produces an opportunity for bargaining, linkage and tradeoffs, across the full panorama of issues, political, technical, and cross-disciplinary, in which the countries concerned are engaged. In the volatility of contemporary international relations, states are continually searching for convergence with other countries, to build issue-specific coalitions. In all these activities, the ambassador ideally integrates near-seamlessly into the structures of the home establishment, especially the foreign ministry, and becomes a participant in the policy making and decision process, relying on instant communications to overcome distance and the traditional barriers of 'missions and headquarters' mindsets.

Does this happen in practice? Yes, in the relatively few countries that have seized the blending of technology with necessity. Many more are yet to realize the possibilities that are open to them, for deriving better value from the entire diplomatic process. Indirectly, this book offers a blueprint of the attainable in one specific area—optimizing the work of the ambassador.

A second theme of the book is that there are very many countries, most of them unfortunately of the developing world, that have

remained mired in the forms and symbols of diplomatic usage, without seizing the substance. In such cases, the ambassador and the system of external representation that he heads have not been used to the full potential. The irony is that improving this delivery system of diplomacy involves neither additional sums of money nor a radical change in systems. In contrast to these countries, some of the new actors on the international stage, the states of Eastern Europe and Central Asia that are variously described as 'emerging' or 'in transition', are innovatively reforming their diplomatic systems to better meet new expectations. The lament of 'capacity enhancement' that the countries of the South frequently put forth at gatherings of the World Trade Organization (WTO), refers to real problems. But here is one arena where capacity amelioration involves a straightforward reform of organizations and methods, within the existing capacities, not the mastering of new technical subjects.

A third and related theme is good governance. Many countries now have 'citizen's charters' for the foreign ministry, spelling out the services that this ministry and the ambassadors abroad are expected and mandated to provide. But the notion that citizens have a right to a good foreign policy and effective implementation of that policy by the diplomatic establishment is not directly acknowledged. It is overlooked that ambassadors and others on their staff are catalysts and instruments in the advancement of national interests, and that an effective diplomatic machine is in itself a major contributor to achieving national goals abroad, be it directly in expanded exports, stronger inflows of investments and technology, and foreign tourists, or in the indirect areas of building a good image for the country and sustaining a web of beneficial foreign relationships.

The final theme of this study is that diplomacy is a profession, the ambassador is a master craftsman, whose skills have been accumulated and shaped over time. For every John Kenneth Galbraith<sup>7</sup> or Madeleine Albright,<sup>8</sup> there are hordes of non-career envoys of forgettable performance. The increasing complexity of contemporary professional demands also requires much better re-training and a

constant process of renewal. Similarly, the chasm that exists between the theorists of international relations and diplomacy studies and the practitioners in the field also needs to be addressed.

The bulk of the work of ambassadors and their staff relates to 'low diplomacy', the ordinary business of managing relations with single countries bilaterally, or handling undramatic conference work in international and regional organizations. In a typical career, there are moments of high diplomacy too, where the envoy is a spectator or even an actor. But to string together a narrative of the ambassador's work that consists of selected events that have occurred over time and geography, is both misleading and a distortion of the real content of diplomacy as it is practiced on the ground. Therefore, the examples offered do relate to singular events, but the flow of the narrative and the description of the ambassador's role is necessarily more pedestrian. Taken individually or in the collective, this is nevertheless vital in the projection and promotion of the external interests of one's country.

The ambassador we study in this book is typically at a place of medium importance, where the opportunity exists to build new cooperation frameworks, as well as sustain and extend the ones that exist. He thus has the capacity to deliver real value for both the sending and the receiving country. It would be unrealistic to focus exclusively on the capitals of the highest importance, fascinating as these places are, because this would convey an unrealistic flavor of the tasks performed. But a reference to these places will occur, as needed, to create a realistic setting and to underscore special challenges at the world's powerful capitals. Equally, our envoy represents a country of medium or moderate importance, because a study focused exclusively on the activities of great power representatives would not be representative of the profession.

A developing country perspective is often offered in this study. I am more familiar with that environment than any other. Given the relative paucity of this genre of diplomacy literature, I hope that this is of interest to those located outside the developing world. A normative purpose, or a hope, is that some ideas offered might evoke reactions and help both developing and transition states to

think of ways that better order their diplomacy and optimize the tools. We can agree that the ambassador as an institution must serve national purposes in the best way possible.

The book incorporates the author's experience in a 35-year career, plus data gathered in research, dialogue, and 40 interviews with current and former ambassadors from 16 countries, and others involved with foreign affairs.

### The Context

Let us provisionally accept the hypothesis that the ambassador remains relevant to the implementation of foreign policy, and to the advancement of the country's external interests. We will come back to this issue at the end of the book. How have internal developments within countries, and changes on the international canvas, affected the role of ambassadors? Diplomacy is a living craft, practiced around the world in the dynamic situations of the day. It is a truism that it adapts continually. Some changes are incremental, often unremarked, and there are others of the more dramatic kind, attracting comment. What are the contextual elements that we should take into account?

The framework of international relations has undergone a paradigm transformation after 1990, at the end of the Cold War, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Marxist doctrine, and a wide acceptance of market capitalism and democracy as the dominant global governance concepts, even while these are implemented around the world in varied and divergent ways so that we are far from a single universal model. We also live in a time of exceptional fluidity in international relations. More than a decade after the Cold War, the world is still in a transitional phase. The US is unchallenged as the dominant locus of military power. The only surviving defense alliance, NATO, has reinvented itself as a co-opted enforcer of peace, no longer limiting actions to its home region. Other global power centers vie for attention, and assert their differentiation on soft issues, even if we are quite far from a truly multipolar world.

In such times of uncertainty and rapid change, countries exert

themselves to maximize their foreign policy options, applying the core calculus of self-interest. This gives a centrality to diplomacy, in the continual search for an external matrix that optimizes the advantage for one's country. This is visible in global affairs, with many states searching for innovative partnership formulae. Regional diplomacy is strongly practiced, taking the shape of preferential trade groupings, resource pooling and shared development strategies, sometimes using economics as a basis for collective security. For instance, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) method of using networking diplomacy to engender stronger security has inspired others, like the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Another feature of regionalization is the search for cooperative structures across geographic regions. Some like APEC, straddling continents on the logic of the 'Pacific rim' and focused on trade, are visibly successful. Others like the Ganga-Mekong Basin group (attempting a link between several countries of South and South-East Asia) or the World Bank-led 'Nile Basin Initiative' (looking for a solution to interrelated problems among nine states, some of which are political adversaries), represent innovative attempts to cobble commonalities. The driving force is a win-win external partnership.

What are the contextual factors to be considered?

One. The foreign ministry (MFA) is no longer the exclusive, and sometimes not even the dominant, channel of international contacts. Virtually every ministry or agency of government has its direct foreign contacts, via the participation in international and regional conferences, dialogue with overseas counterparts and the pursuit of aid cooperation agreements. Even a 'centralist' foreign ministry like Japan's *Gaimusho*, renowned for tight control over external contacts, has given up its insistence that officials lead all delegations at foreign negotiations. They rationalize this change on the ground that officials are now available in other ministries with sufficient English language mastery to handle delegation leadership.<sup>9</sup> This is true, but the real reason for change is the relative ascendancy of functional ministry specialists gaining over the MFA generalists.

In developing countries, the finance ministry or the planning ministry is usually the arbiter on foreign aid issues, and the MFA is often a spectator.<sup>10</sup> The finance ministry often unilaterally handles

the dialogue with multilateral institutions like the World Bank and the IMF. This is also to some extent the situation in some of the developed countries.<sup>11</sup> There is an identical situation with regard to WTO affairs, where ministries of foreign trade or commerce call the shots. The impact of these elements is portrayed in a fascinating collection of essays on foreign ministries edited by Brian Hocking. He speaks cogently of the new 'coordination role' that MFAs have to carve out for themselves if they are to remain relevant.<sup>12</sup> But in many countries the actual situation in external relations is more akin to unregulated *laissez faire* than any kind of orderly MFA-led harmonization.<sup>13</sup> This is not a sudden development, but one that has been accentuated in recent years. For instance, the agenda of pre-1994 GATT was not nearly as politically or economically charged as that of its successor, the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Another level of complexity is the external role that sub-state entities have developed, whether they are provinces or regions of countries, or major cities. We see this best in West Europe where the process of EU integration has been accompanied by a counter-trend for regions to establish their own direct contacts in neighboring countries and others—summed up in the word 'disintermediation'. Often, the regional cultural identity of a sub-state is the driving force, compounded by economics, a search for markets and inward investment. ASEAN has its 'growth triangles and quadrilaterals' that imaginatively unite neighboring regions of member-countries. Similar trends are visible in large federal countries like Australia, India and the US.

These developments place the ambassador in a dilemma, both at the place of assignment and in relation to his home country. He is the representative of the entire government, with the MFA as his direct master, and the MFA sometimes resents his initiatives with other ministries. At the same time, he finds a new opportunity to carve out a constructive role for himself, by developing his own contact network with all the official agencies that are engaged in bilateral, regional and multilateral relations, both at home and abroad. He is able to make a unique contribution, as a value provider. As Kingman Brewster has written: 'The ambassador is more important than when only the (State) Department was engaged in foreign relations.'<sup>14</sup>

Two. In like fashion, non-state actors are increasingly active on the international stage.<sup>15</sup> Globalization has ensured that 'the accepted notion of which actor operates in which environment erodes' and this blurs 'public-private distinction in the management of international policy', as Hocking argued in a case study covering Swiss banks, and their handling of Nazi gold.<sup>16</sup> He shows that these banks faced severe criticism in the US, and Swiss diplomacy made critical errors in handling US public opinion; Hocking concludes that the banks found themselves abandoned by home officials and eventually dependent on intervention by the US State Department.

Governments find it essential to co-opt non-state agencies as partners in handling foreign relationships, bilateral and multilateral. For instance, it is now common practice to take business delegations to accompany heads of state and government—and even foreign ministers or other ministers—involving them in the economic dialogue.<sup>17</sup> At the meetings of the G-15 group of developing countries (a kind of counter-point to the G-8, established in 1989), a parallel business forum attempts to create new linkages among the countries, to solidify South-South cooperation. Similar business fora accompany other international summits. Delegations to multilateral meetings like those of WTO now routinely include representatives of apex bodies of industry and business and other social sectors, as more and more countries realize that complex economic issues demand inputs that government officials are unable to furnish. Such non-official participation is also essential for building domestic consensus. When nations are faced with adverse external developments, they sometimes find home allies among non-official agencies, to help argue their case with foreign partners. For instance, facing pressure in the US and Europe over software services outsourced to India, the industry and the government work in partnership, each tackling the interlocutors where it best carries conviction.<sup>18</sup> Some countries have institutionalized such public-private partnerships, while others rely on flexible ad hoc arrangements.

Not all interventions by domestic non-state actors are to the liking of their governments. Civil society agencies and NGOs play external affairs roles that flow from their own agendas or tele-guided by external sponsorship.<sup>19</sup> Sometimes they defy the country's official

stand. Examples from the US: the activities of ordinary citizens at places like Iraq before the war of April 2003, or earlier in the former Yugoslav states. Sometimes they create situations of embarrassment to the home country, for instance, when they join foreign NGOs to criticize their own government on human rights issues. Some observers argue that 'the era of the ordinary person has finally arrived in international relations. Citizen diplomats want to bypass professionals. They are more altruistic, autonomous agents.'<sup>20</sup> Non-state agencies believe that they have a better long-term perspective of the national interest than governments, while in fact they are special interest minority groups, often projecting their agendas via ethical principles.

Especially relevant in international affairs are the 'track two' dialogue initiatives by non-official agents. Sometimes governments use them for trial balloons or deniable soundings; at other times they autonomously anticipate or prepare the way, if official dialogue faces an impasse through blocked, antagonistic positions. The virtue of non-state activities in conflict resolution is flexibility and tension-reduction. Yet, these non-official agents need some connection with governments, such as a reporting channel, to valorize their activities.

Communication with domestic non-state bodies is mainly handled by home agencies, while embassies concentrate on non-state entities in the country of assignment. The ambassador cultivates non-state sectors because they occupy a part of the foreign affairs *espace*, especially when they possess credibility in their areas of speciality. Understanding them is part of his 'outreach' to the movers and shakers of the receiving country. An instance where an envoy used such contacts to strengthen his message to the host country is narrated in Chapter 3. Ambassadors sometimes develop these contacts in attempts to neutralize their influence on issues of serious divergences, though such interventions are not easy and can backfire.<sup>21</sup>

Three. Issues on the international agenda have multiplied, and are more complex, intertwined and technical than ever before. This is a manifestation of globalization and the increased interdependence among nations. The ambassador and other diplomats find themselves interacting with a diversity of specialists, one day dealing

with subjects relating to gene pools or climate change, and the next day with the impact of financial derivative trading on the velocity of short-term capital flows. The ambassador has to deal with many kinds of specialists from a policy or coordination perspective. For example, the daily 'prayer' or coordination meeting at a major EU permanent mission at Brussels may bring together some 200 or more officials, many of them engaged in highly technical dialogue with EU counterparts or the European Commission. The permanent representative to the EU, who has on his team one or more deputies of ambassador rank, may not have the time to discuss more than a few of the day's subjects that need local decision, or give direction on the tactics to be pursued in the committees and working groups.<sup>22</sup> This calls for an ability to master diversity and complexity. Some have also called this 'broad-band' ability, and high 'learnability'. These are the new requirements for the ambassador.

Four. The pace of bilateral and multilateral encounters among heads of state and governments has multiplied. Up to 1930, the total number of foreign heads who had visited the US was about 30; today a larger number visit Washington DC in any quarter of the year. The exchange of visits among smaller countries is no less intense. Besides traditional 'state' visits, there are frequent 'working' as well as 'unofficial' and 'routine' visits, and even 'stopover' encounters between high dignitaries. In these innovations, the focus is on intensive consultations among leaders, devoid of protocol frills. The peregrinations of foreign ministers are no less hectic; keeping them company are the ministers dealing with economic issues and others. Add to this the demands of regional diplomacy, also producing frequent encounters. At the UN General Assembly, a new trend is the transformation of the first days of the traditional opening in late September into a global summit, under one rubric or another, attracting leaders from around the world. There is no dearth of special UN summits and other episodic gatherings, like the St Petersburg tercentenary in May 2003, assembling the leaders of 40 countries. Dean Rusk was prophetic when he wrote: 'Summit diplomacy is to be approached with the wariness with which a prudent physician prescribes a habit-forming drug.'<sup>23</sup>

These personal contacts among leaders are supplemented with

phone calls and direct messages that may bypass MFAs and ambassadors. The practice of such direct diplomacy is not confined to political leaders. Senior officials based at home too have shed traditional inhibitions and pursue direct contacts of their own. Records of such direct diplomacy are not always maintained. Sometimes the ambassador who learns that his leader has spoken to his counterpart in the country of assignment finds it easier to obtain a summary of the issues discussed, and the follow-up that he ought to undertake, from local friendly sources within the receiving country—usually the aides in the offices of the high personalities—rather than from the home country.<sup>24</sup>

Such multiple and sometimes unrecorded contacts have several consequences. It makes it harder to capture a precise overview of what is happening in relationships. This is a greater problem for the MFA than for the ambassador. For one thing, the MFA at home lacks the local informal, multiple resources of the envoy. Further, varied contact channels, operating in real time across different subjects and locations, produce a kaleidoscopic pattern that the MFA has neither the energy nor the means to follow.

At first sight, it reduces the role of the ambassador in terms of his direct participation. But in most situations it actually adds to his coordination responsibility. It is the task of the resident embassy to piece bits of information together to produce the nearest approximation to the full picture in a particular country. An experienced European diplomat has written that it is an illusion that direct dialogue and concordance at the top can resolve issues. All the work of preparation, communication at multiple levels in the partner country, and follow-up to produce sustainable result also has to be carried out, and this falls on the resident envoy. He sums up this vital support work: 'The ambassador is there to check, channel, patch up, temporize, catalyze, buffer.'<sup>25</sup>

Five. The spread of the Internet and the availability of vast amounts of information on websites, has led to a kind of 'commodification' of information. When anyone can get hold of information, control over it is seldom the lever. If from the comfort of one's office or home one can scan the principal news stories, feature articles and editorials from almost any newspaper or journal in the world,

geography does not matter, and the diplomat's location abroad is no longer so exclusive. Similarly, the MFA does not depend on the embassy as its prime external resource. The embassy team now concentrates on the analysis and information synthesis of issues that are not addressed by the media, or lie in sectors that the general public interest does not cover, but are valuable for MFAs and others at home. Thus the tasks for analysis and data collection are reoriented.

The other consequence is that the velocity at which one has to respond has accelerated, and the mission-MFA communication has to be continuous and rapid. For instance the 'official spokesperson' of a foreign ministry cannot hide behind his inability to comment on fast-breaking news, because this leaves the terrain open to others to present their own slant. The political officer and the ambassador have to be tuned to the way developments in their country of assignment are playing at home, and move with alacrity to provide the MFA with vital material or angles, from the perspective of the home country. A book on the work of ambassadors in Washington DC quotes the Egyptian envoy as saying: 'CNN is the enemy of today's ambassador. We are always behind. Often I am awakened in the middle of the night with a call from home. I turn to CNN immediately to see what's happened while I was sleeping.'<sup>26</sup>

Six. Good governance concepts have entered the political lexicon. Around the world, there is a concern with governments delivering value to citizens. Public opinion holds governments accountable. This means value-for-money in all activities that use public funds, and a transparency in action and documentation. For instance, most democracies have legislation that upholds the public right to information, typically enacted in the past decade or less. Countries in Africa are extending 'citizen charter' principles to the MFA and to embassies.<sup>27</sup> In a few countries, such accountability concepts are now being extended to the foreign affairs establishment.

In the UK, under the impetus first given by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher two decades back, the British Foreign Office and other departments publish detailed documents on policy goals and actual performance in meeting predetermined targets; for the great part these are quantified and enumerated.<sup>28</sup> Australia and New Zealand have carried out similar open narrations of the objectives



and outcomes of their own diplomatic process. In France a new organic fiscal law mandates the publication of performance norms.

This too impacts on the ambassador, who finds that his activities are under closer scrutiny, by the government and the public. His performance is measured against pre-set norms. This works best in a tangible area like the delivery of consular services, the one activity that brings diplomatic and consular offices closest to ordinary members of the public. Some techniques are borrowed from business management. These notions are anathema to diplomacy traditionalists, but the way an ambassador should run his embassy is in principle no way different from how the regional chief executive of a transnational enterprise operates a country office. The product handled by the envoy is mainly intangible, but so is the portfolio of some comparable commercial offices, for example the brand equity value safeguarded by international product manufacturers, or the intellectual property they own. Similarly, standard human resource management techniques are now widely used in MFAs, applied to assessments of individual performance, promotions as also the selection of career envoys. Performance management is reviewed further in the Chapter 5.

Seven. We have considered the revolution in information technology and communications moving to a convergence of these sectors. We realize that the image of the ambassador as a messenger at the end of a telephone or data modem, executing instructions from the home, is a caricature. What may not be immediately apparent is that technology has in fact enhanced the envoy's role. Distinguished US diplomat Ellsworth Bunker had written a decade earlier: '[It is] more feasible than it used to be for the ambassador to be part of the policy-formulation process.'<sup>29</sup> It is now far easier to consult him instantaneously, and obtain his inputs into the policy process, before the high decision makers are presented with options, of a tactical or strategic character. Communication convenience anchors the ambassador more firmly into the policy loop. One interlocutor pithily declared during an interview: 'No ambassador should receive instructions that he has not helped to draft.'<sup>30</sup>

This is not to say that the ambassador was not consulted earlier. After all, policy advice has been a classic responsibility. Besides the

advice routed via cipher telegrams and dispatches, foreign ministries call envoys at key assignments to headquarters for consultations, at least a couple of times a year, sometimes often as two months or less, as in the case of envoys to neighboring countries. Most foreign ministries hold documents that cannot be sent out from headquarters, and face-to-face dialogue is often indispensable. The change is that Internet-based 'intranets' and similar communication protocols now make it everyday routine for the envoy to interact with colleagues belonging to different departments and ministries at headquarters, and get a sense of the way thinking is evolving.<sup>31</sup>

This permits the envoy to make his input in a more decisive and result-oriented manner than was ever possible without this facility, going by the remarks of several interlocutors during this study.<sup>32</sup>

Canada is one country that has moved fast in the application of state-of-the-art communications and information technology in its diplomatic establishment. One of the conclusions of a workshop held in Ottawa in June 1997 was: 'New IT will not replace missions abroad, but the work conducted at missions has evolved and the number of people posted abroad has declined as some work is centralized at Ottawa.'<sup>33</sup> Around the world, countries are upgrading their diplomatic communication systems; this invariably enhances the quality of the dialogue between the ambassador and his team, and headquarters.

Eight. With the involvement of many ministries and government agencies in external affairs, many of their representatives are to be found within the embassy. One study notes that the percentage of personnel within US embassies from the State Department has varied over the years between 15% and 23%.<sup>34</sup> There are US embassies that accommodate representatives of up to 30 different departments. Other countries do not witness the same numerical proliferation or diversity, but there is comparable growth in the range of representatives housed within the mission. A rule of thumb: the larger the embassy, the greater the diversity and the smaller the representation of the diplomatic service. In contrast, small missions often consist exclusively of MFA officials.

For the ambassador, diversity translates into serious management problems, plus a difficulty in imposing a unified approach, as we

examine in Chapter 6. It should not be surprising that the US, faced with an acute diversity challenge, has tried to impose coordination and discipline through a strong official mandate for the ambassador. Another problem with embassy diversity is that officials may not speak with one voice to the agencies of the receiving country. There is also a lack of uniformity in assessments sent to the home country. This is not a bad thing in itself, since a single perspective can miss out other valid angles that should be addressed. But the direct communication between agency representatives and their own headquarters often do not factor in the ambassador's perspective; this can lead to distorted feedback.

Nine. A certain 'class' of entrants, in terms of educational background, plus social and family background, earlier dominated the old diplomatic services. Virtually all countries now witness a democratization of their services. In the UK, this has meant an end to the domination by 'Oxbridge'. In several other European countries, the preeminence of law graduates has ended. Similarly, in Thailand, the past concentration of aristocratic families is diluted. In China, the new entrants come from a wider spectrum of educational institutions. Across South Asia, beyond the urban elite, the net is now cast much wider: young people with rural backgrounds join the foreign services, reflecting also greater regional diversity, and a wider range of disciplines studied.<sup>35</sup>

This means that a greater variety of ambassadors are being appointed, today and tomorrow. Elite values, or 'service standards' do not dominate as before. One consequence is a need for better cultural understanding when diplomats treat with one another. Cross-cultural studies should figure prominently in the training curriculum. Training will also need to be more intensive, focused especially on the mid-career stages, on the analogy of advanced management training for senior business executives, or war colleges for armed force officers of command rank, even if many foreign ministries do not recognize this as yet (Chapter 7).

### Gender Issues

Gender disparity is a striking fact in diplomatic services, as in other branches of civil services in most countries. In the majority of

countries, the percentage of women ambassadors is between 5% and 10%. At the UN headquarters in New York, out of 190 permanent representatives, barely ten or twelve on average are women, a situation that one female envoy formerly stationed there characterized as 'shocking'.<sup>36</sup> The situation is a little better in the presence of women in diplomatic services as a whole, with an average that hovers around 15% to 20%, while numbers in Scandinavia and East and Central Europe are much higher. Until the early 1970s, countries such as the UK and India, even required women officers to resign on marriage. Around the world, more women now enter diplomatic services, and this must translate into a larger numbers of female ambassadors.

For reasons of family obligations, personal choice and perceived discrimination as well, the attrition rate among women tends to be higher than among male counterparts in most foreign services. Countries of Scandinavia, East Europe and Latin America are the trend leaders. For instance, Copenhagen is renowned as especially welcoming female envoys, and consistently ranks as the diplomatic capital with the largest number. In a number of diplomatic services—in Central Europe, Scandinavia, Singapore and China, among others—some 40% to 50% of new entrants are women, which holds the promise that gender equations will change dramatically.

This book uses the pronoun 'he' for the ambassador, simply in recognition of an overwhelming reality, without implying that male envoys are superior or preferable to female counterparts. Both personal experience and the evidence gathered from others amply demonstrate that the performance of many female ambassadors is outstanding. They have the advantage of natural grace in a profession where to some degree image is also the substance. Given that women envoys reconcile their careers with frequently heavy demands of family life, like many other female professionals, we should admire them even more. Diplomacy is one profession where the male does not start with any special advantage. The clear trend in most countries is towards a redressal of a gender imbalance, and an elevation to a high rank is therefore welcome.<sup>37</sup> This too is one of the changes afoot in diplomacy.

routinely enjoyed direct personal access to heads of state and government in the receiving state, and handled weighty political issues with authority.<sup>2</sup> Trade seldom engaged these ambassadors.<sup>3</sup> Matters like investment mobilization and technology access were not even on the ambassador's horizon. Culture did figure in his agenda, but only the grander events. Issues relating to the media, science or other functional fields seldom intruded on his day-to-day activities. It was still the age of high diplomacy.

This pluralization of international relations reacted with other alterations in the diplomatic process, and since about the 1970s, other change elements have come into play, leading to a substantial transformation. The ambassador may still be engaged in high diplomacy, but only during fleeting moments. It is the principals at home, the presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers, who rule over the elevated political dialogue. The ambassador—working together with his home counterparts at the foreign ministry—has become the facilitator, the handler of detail, the remover of obstacles, the master of logistics, the specialist of follow-up, the resident trouble-shooter, and the one who sometimes handles the fallout if there are problems, to put back on track a derailed relationship. In opportune situations he may also have the role of a catalyst. He spans a bewildering array of functional areas and subjects, and deals with multiple players, both abroad and at home. Almost nothing is excluded from his action arena. He thus finds himself deeply engaged in low diplomacy, much of it unglamorous, but representing the very stuff of contemporary international life.

The termination of the Cold War in 1990 ended the stable framework of international relations that had anchored the foreign policy and diplomacy of most countries. Those that belonged to the West or the East had operated in the certitude of bloc dynamics, with its pre-determined relationships. For the countries of the South, non-alignment and its economic variant, G-77, broadly provided a fixed set of compass points, within which each navigated its own set of policies. The global terrain was familiar and predictable. It provided the setting for the great issues of détente, disarmament and development that dominated the international discourse.

We have since moved into times that are unpredictable,

## THE TRANSFORMED PLENIPOLENTIARY

An outstanding Indian diplomat of the first generation, K.P.S. Menon, who served as ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1952 to 1961, has written of a conversation with an old woman during his visit to the town of Novogrod. The lady asked his interpreter who he was; hoping that she would be impressed, the interpreter explained that 'his excellency' was the Indian ambassador. She responded impatiently: 'Yes, yes, I know he is ambassador. What does he do?' Menon adds: '[This is] a question which, for the good of my soul, I have often asked myself.'<sup>1</sup>

Does the ambassador have a role to play in today's globalized world? What value is delivered to the nation-state by what appears to be largely a conspicuously extravagant apparatus of flag-flying permanent diplomatic representation abroad? Can the tasks and services the envoy performs be handled in other, more economical ways?

During post-World War II decolonization, the international system underwent rapid expansion. The mere 50 states that signed the UN Charter at San Francisco in 1945 had tripled in 25 years. For these new states, establishing their representatives abroad and receiving foreign envoys at home was a high priority, an expression of their international personality. Those years were the final phase of classic diplomacy, comprising almost exclusively of privileged dialogue among official agents, far from the public gaze. Ambassadors

characterized by transformation occurring at an unprecedented velocity. The fluidity of the international system produces a renaissance of diplomacy, where each country seeks to build a web of diversified relationships that supports its external objectives, and maximizes its policy options. Countries give priority to developing beneficial partnerships with as wide a range of countries as possible, through intensive bilateral diplomacy, as well as coalition building, often of an issue-specific nature. Regional diplomacy is a major growth industry, with states attempting to combine geography and economics, not leaving out history, culture and ethnicity, to intensify mutually advantageous cooperation in their neighborhood, and create a support net of political affinity as well. Multilateral diplomacy is a high priority, sometimes even at the cost of other forms of diplomacy.

These circumstances make it worthwhile to re-examine the instruments through which states deal with one another—prominent among which is the ambassador. In particular we need to ask if latent potential in the system of external representation can be optimized. As we see, the envoy no longer monopolizes external representation. But the very plurality of actors has increased his responsibility as the constant element in the multiform dialogue between states. Our generic examination of the envoy is pertinent because many foreign ministries have carried out reform and restructuring since 1990, but there is little published information or any thorough new study of the contemporary role of the ambassador, other than a German review of 2000, the Paschke report on embassies in the European Union.<sup>4</sup>

While diplomacy is in its renaissance, paradoxically, foreign ministries and their apparatus are increasingly queried for their *raison d'être*, particularly in Europe, where the EU integration process has created a new governance terrain that is neither domestic nor foreign. Foreign ministries jostle for credible roles in this shared *espace*, continually challenged by functional ministries that were earlier circumscribed in their domestic competencies.<sup>5</sup> Diplomatic services face intensive scrutiny over their performance and even their value.<sup>6</sup>

Robert D. Kaplan wrote in 1996: 'The embassy may not survive

beyond a few more decades.<sup>7</sup> The profession has its pessimists too. A US Consul in Moscow who resigned in 1980 asserted: 'We do not need an ambassador in Moscow...he has nothing to do.'<sup>8</sup> Some years back there was an abundance of dismissive caustic comments on this theme from former US National Security Adviser Frank Carlucci.<sup>9</sup> Henry Kissinger once remarked: 'Ambassadors don't count anymore.'<sup>10</sup>

These are among the issues this study attempts to address. It postulates an ideal yet completely practical action arena that is available to the ambassador. We assume that the ambassador has the motivation to deliver his best for the country he represents, and that the ambassador and the system of overseas representation he heads are vital to promoting the external interests. Further, in our age of globalization, interdependence and multi-form dialogue between states, the work of the ambassador has increased. This applies to the bilateral as well as the multilateral arena. In the real world not all the players live up to their challenges, and this is especially true of the bureaucracy. The account that is offered in this study is both descriptive and normative.

### Who is the Ambassador?

For many, the ambassador is the personification of international relations between states. He is a visible symbol of foreign relations, even more than his direct master, the foreign minister and the official apparatus that the minister heads—called variously the ministry of foreign affairs, the foreign office, the external affairs ministry, the department of state, *et al*, abbreviated for convenience as the MFA. The ambassador serves in the frontline, in foreign capitals, and comes to notice especially in periods of difficulty in relationships, when he becomes a symbol of national honor. A *Dictionary of Diplomacy* calls him 'a diplomatic agent of the highest rank...head of a diplomatic mission to a foreign state'.<sup>11</sup> He is also the one often held responsible when things go wrong in a bilateral relationship or at a multilateral institution.

After the decolonization wave that started in 1945, the newly independent nations gave high priority to installing their envoys

abroad and receiving embassies from foreign states. These envoy exchanges were perceived as a powerful symbol of the new sovereign personality, even the legitimacy of the state. One visible manifestation of this receptivity to envoys from abroad was the allocation of prime land to foreign diplomatic missions in the capitals of new states.<sup>12</sup> Countries, large and small, also invested sizable resources—always scarce, facing competing needs at home—in bedecking their ambassadors abroad with the paraphernalia of high office. This has included a large residence with ample space for holding receptions and other representational functions, chauffeured limousines and other material resources, plus a hierarchy of support personnel of diplomatic and non-diplomatic rank. For some newly independent states, projecting a favorable and distinctive image of the home country abroad became a greater priority than the concrete work of building relationships.<sup>13</sup> For the older states of Europe and others too, the symbolism of the ambassador and his representational role has been no less important. These states have also extended their diplomatic reach far and wide, even more than the developing states.

The past thirty years have witnessed a clear global trend towards a reduction of ceremonial and ritual, for instance in summit diplomacy and foreign visits by leaders. But the image endures of the ambassador as a member of an elite grouping, the diplomatic corps, hobnobbing with the most prominent of the host country's national political and official personalities, plus the leaders of society, the *glitterati*. An abundance of local social journals and gossip columns burnish this otherworldly image, even in small capitals. This glamour is a legacy of the days when the foreign envoy was a member of a royal court, representing one sovereign to another. An obstinately cherished set of diplomatic ceremonials evoking the past, also refuses to die out. It starts with the extravagant language of the 'letter of credential', with which the sending head of state entrusts to a brother foreign head of state the execution of the ambassador's duties. Another apparent legacy is the whole panoply of real-life privileges and immunities that the ambassador enjoys, and the classification of envoys and their ranking codified by the Vienna Congress of 1815. In fact, inviolability of the envoy's person harks back much further, to the very oldest days of exchange of *ad*

*hoc* emissaries in different civilizations for which record is available to us—one of the oldest of which are the Amarna archives of Middle Egypt in the second millennium BC. As we see later, these immunities serve a vital purpose even today.

The vast majority of ambassadors are resident envoys charged with representing the sending country in one single receiving country. In addition, there are the ambassadors who head permanent missions to international organizations, engaging in multilateral work that is qualitatively different from that of the bilateral envoy. Then there are other individuals who bear the title but perform varied tasks, or simply use the title as an honorific. It is useful to distinguish between the different kinds of ambassadors; this is detailed in an extended endnote.<sup>14</sup>

Another point to be considered as we look at the ambassador's actual role and work parameters: where is he assigned? His tasks, priorities, methods, working style and operational environment, hinge on the importance of the country of his location *as perceived by his own country*. Given the differences among nations in power, economic capability and the role they play on the international stage, it is this subjective judgment of the sending state that determines the order of importance of envoys sent abroad.

There are several parallel criteria that determine the relative international hierarchy for each country. The countries of one's own region are usually ranked high in importance on the basis of the classic SWOT formula: strength, weakness, opportunity and threat. Then are the 'problem' countries that endanger one's security or vital interests, or control vital resources or access routes. The great powers, on the basis of their influence in one's own region, their capacity to pose a real threat, or the potential they offer for productive partnership are as vital.<sup>15</sup> Other countries are ranked by several interrelated factors: the density of relationships (measured in trade and investments, cultural and educational contacts, other cooperation arenas, diaspora settlements, etc.); future potential for developing cooperation; historical, linguistic, religious or ethnic affinities, and special elements as mutually perceived.

Using such a matrix of concurrent and dynamic calculations, a priority map can be drawn for each nation. Most countries have a

formal or informal internal system of ranking their own ambassadors, in grades or categories. For example the US has three effective grades, as do Germany and India. Only a few countries, such as Kenya, Thailand and Turkey, appoint ambassadors in a single grade. In the majority of diplomatic services, the ambassador carries his own grade to the assigned post; an ambassador in grade I at say, Tokyo, might be succeeded by another in grade II—the internal rankings naturally do not affect his status for the receiving country. There are a few countries like Germany and China that attach ranks to capitals; for instance, only a German ambassador in the highest grade can serve in Tokyo, or at any of the other 12 assignments reserved for this rank.<sup>16</sup> China ensures that only envoys with the personal rank of vice-minister are sent to the seven locations abroad that it deems as the most vital.

### Theory and Practice

International relations (IR) theory is divided into several broad streams, but none of these directly touch on the role of the ambassador.<sup>17</sup> In some ways the ambassador may feel close to the 'agency' theory advocates. For one thing, he is conscious of his own action arena, for advancing his country's interests. Given the work that he undertakes, the ambassador tends to be a pragmatist, aware that save in exceptional situations, he will accomplish incremental gain, or at best open up a new activity segment, often to be developed further by a successor. He learns quickly enough that what is attainable, is often not the best or the ideal. Negotiation and dialogue involve compromise, generally settling for less than the full cake. The envoy realizes that he is an artisan engaged in a long-term endeavor, working in a continuum like the builder of the past engaged on a major cathedral or temple project, indebted to his predecessors, and conscious that it is his successors who must carry forward the labors.

Some scholars challenge the rigidity of IR theory constructs, especially the dominant neo-realist ideas, which over-emphasize the political-security dimension in international relations at the cost of economic, cultural and the other soft forms of diplomacy.<sup>18</sup> A

pursuit of this discussion involves too large a digression from our theme, but suffice it to say that practice-determined analysis of diplomacy, from times past to the present day, tends to suggest that these non-political dimensions of diplomacy are more dominant in external relations, and govern the actual work content, than most IR theorists would have us believe. The typical work domain of envoys and other diplomacy practitioners is better understood through empirical research than abstract theory.

A peculiarity of diplomacy studies is the gulf between practitioners on the ground and academic theorists. Former Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban has called this an 'intrinsic antagonism', adding that diplomacy 'is not as yet plugged into any recognized science' and that 'it does not hide behind an inaccessible vocabulary'.<sup>19</sup> Distinguished theorist Richard Langhorne has noted the confusion on whether 'diplomacy is an expertise in its own right or a collection of skills'.<sup>20</sup> Another study notes: 'The value of a diplomat lay not in any specialist knowledge he might possess, but in his ability to communicate, negotiate and persuade.'<sup>21</sup> This begs the question: why is diplomacy not acceptable more universally as a specialist skill?

A consequence of the theorist-practitioner distance and uncertainty about the profession is that few working diplomats study the concepts or theoretical structures offered by academics. In return, the latter seem disjointed from the practical field where their ideas can be tested and refined. This situation is not unique, but there may not be many disciplines offering more spectacular divergence.

This leads to misjudgments. An instance: the speculation some years back on the relevance and utility of the ambassador. In the early 1990s it became a fashionable theme in academia that the resident envoy had outlived his utility, and was reduced to providing services as an inn-keeper, travel agent and greeter and receiver of visiting high personalities and delegations from the home country. His plenipotentiary powers had long been rendered irrelevant; he simply acted to implement instructions sent to him from home, via instant communication methods. 24-hour TV news networks and the print media overtook his role as providers of information. Heads of state and foreign ministers talked directly to one another, as did senior officials from their capitals. Consequently, the resident envoy

had become more or less irrelevant, bereft of value.<sup>22</sup> It became customary to ask students in academic diplomatic studies if the traditional embassy 'has not outlived its usefulness'. Another scholar asked a bit plaintively: 'How can we explain the persistence of the ambassador?'<sup>23</sup> A good catalogue is provided in a section entitled 'The Case for Euthanasia' in a fine textbook by G.R. Berridge, who goes on to elaborate a 'Case for Reprieve' as well.<sup>24</sup> A counter-trend produced a whole set of writings that asserted the continuing vitality of the resident envoy, often couched in defensive terms.<sup>25</sup>

While this debate raged, in the real world the networks of resident diplomatic representation continued to grow. The end of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia increased the number of sovereign states, and changed the matrix of strategic calculations. Many countries found it vital to develop relationships with this expanded set of international partners, and widen their external options. In the other direction, cutbacks in government spending produced a counter-trend, of closing down missions in places of marginal interest. On balance, an expansionary trend has outweighed the cutbacks in the past ten years. There have been some other interesting developments.

Following the unification of Germany in 1991, the German Parliament decided to shift the capital from Bonn to Berlin, with a sizable minority of government agencies remaining behind in Bonn. This set in motion an event unique in modern times, the near-total relocation of the government of a major power.<sup>26</sup> The capital transfer was implemented in 1999, when the new Federal Chancellery building opened in Berlin and the Parliament moved into the rebuilt *Reichstag*. Diplomatic missions were forced to acquire new embassy premises in the very expensive new capital, or refurbish old buildings if they were lucky enough to own something from the past.<sup>27</sup> They had to decide on the size of embassies they needed for the future, based on a realistic calculation. Virtually every country has opted for bigger chancery premises, reflecting a uniform calculation of high-profile diplomatic representation. An exception has been the US that has implemented a downsizing of its mission, mainly as a result of the end of the residual post-WWII arrangements that

became irrelevant in unified Germany. Between 1991 and 1996, US-based embassy and consulates staff was cut by one third.<sup>28</sup>

The other development in Germany as a member of the EU has been the Paschke Report (September 2000), which examined the role of the bilateral embassy among EU states. The report notes that member-country ministry personnel communicate directly with their opposite numbers and many ministries have liaison officers from partner governments; joint committees and the like have created dense exchange networks and huge flows of information. It adds that:

...certain functions of traditional diplomacy have become superfluous. Ambassadors in Europe no longer need to negotiate with host country governments or handover letters; formal démarches also tend to be rare, if only because bilateral problems between EU members are also a rarity. However, the number of themes and issues which are the common concern of all partners is constantly increasing...

The fact that political leaders know each other well...have resulted in a situation where communication between governments usually takes place without the intervention and often even the knowledge of embassies.

Nevertheless, embassies in Europe have not become obsolete.

Among our 14 partner governments there is not a single one that would support such a view. The opposite is in fact the case. Almost all partners agree that Europe has imposed new tasks on their embassies. Some have increased their embassy staffs in EU countries...others have decided to open embassies in countries where they have hitherto had no presence.<sup>29</sup>

The Paschke Report lists three tasks that embassies no longer need to perform: conducting formal negotiations with the host government, briefing home governments, and trade promotion, which are now the tasks of other actors. The list of the 'new challenges' is much longer, namely: 'public diplomacy', i.e. explaining to the wider public in partner countries what Germany is trying to achieve in the European integration process; 'promoting Germany as an attractive place in which to invest and do business'; 'keeping an overall view of the whole spectrum of relations with our respective partners'; 'coordinating individual aspects and analysing political developments'; consular services; cultural contacts; and promoting

the German language and interest in higher education in Germany. It is not surprising that the Paschke report has produced an impact in other countries as well.

### Empirical Evidence

Every diplomatic service has its envoy exemplars. For the erstwhile Soviet Union, Anatoly Dobrynin was one such, for twenty-four years their point man in Washington DC, enjoying access to presidents and secretaries of state, who for a while even had a special parking spot in the State Department garage! In the first years of the Cold War the US had George Kennan in Moscow, widely acknowledged as a giant figure in the shaping of policy, author of the famous 'long telegram', a cipher message that shaped the US policy of containment towards the Soviet Union. These names are well documented in diplomatic history.<sup>30</sup>

There are less renowned but equally persuasive models. In the early 1980s, the Bulgarian Ambassador in Delhi was one Tocho Tochev, unique for the access he enjoyed across the official spectrum, from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to the junior-most of desk officers. Then there was Singapore's Ambassador in Bonn in the period 1990-94, Tony Siddique, who used a combination of exceptional German language ability, networking finesse and single-minded application of eco-political diplomacy to build strong connections for the benefit of his city-state, and for ASEAN. He transformed the Asia-Pacific group of ambassadors in Germany into a proactive force for joint region marketing, reaching out to different Federal States, major cities and leading corporates.

India had a remarkable envoy in Apa Saheb Pant, the scion of a small princely ruler in Maharashtra, sent on his first assignment as India's Commissioner to East Africa, reaching Nairobi on 15 August 1947, the day India became independent. With his exceptional integrity and passion, in four years he built such a network of influence with the leaders of the independence movement in the region, including Jomo Kenyatta, the father of Kenya's liberation, that the British colonial administration was compelled to seek his

discreet withdrawal. At Nairobi and subsequent ambassadorships at Jakarta, Oslo, Cairo, Rome and London, Apa Saheb combined deep faith in his mission, and personal credibility built on transparent actions, which won him acceptance in the host country and strong confidence of the home authorities, a balance that is hard to sustain in practice. In the multilateral arena there have been envoys like Singapore's Tommy Koh, and India's Rikhy Jaipal, who too gained singular acclaim among their hard-boiled contemporaries at the U.N. Headquarters in New York, and advanced the vital interests of their countries. A generation earlier, there was India's Arthur Lall, who chaired the international conference in Vienna that framed the 1961 Convention on Diplomatic Relations, and went on to become the Permanent Representative in New York, a distinguished professor at Columbia University and author of several important books.

One of the strangest stories concerns Indian non-career envoy Kushak Bakula, who represented India in Mongolia from 1989 till 1999. Bakula is the head monk of the important Buddhist monastery Sankar, located in Ladakh, and is much revered as a religious leader. After a low-profile six-year term as a member of the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of the Indian parliament), he went on his solitary overseas assignment to Mongolia, at a time when the global collapse of communist rule and that country's search for identity created a unique juncture of circumstance. He was an instant success in Ulan Bator, accepted by the state hierarchy and by ordinary Mongols as a religious mentor, who effectively helped them towards a reawakening of their Buddhist faith. Each day people thronged in queues a kilometer long, for his *darshan* (i.e. invocation of his blessings). Though his activities bore little resemblance to normal diplomatic representation, he also advanced bilateral cooperation to new levels.<sup>31</sup> His unique role in the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia owes little to the professional edicts of Nicolson, but harks back much further in Indian history, recalling the emissaries sent by Emperor Ashoka of the Maurya dynasty (270-230 BC) to Sri Lanka and South-East Asia to promote the Buddhist religion.

Each singular success of an envoy, in circumstance extraordinary



or banal, occurs at the intersection of a distinctive context and an individual with the vision and tenacity to grasp the offered opportunity. The human agent is a powerful force for change.

Evidence is available from the history of different countries that the right envoy at the appropriate location has played a critical role in transforming and enriching bilateral relations, or advancing national interests on the international stage. This is visible in the manner in which an ambassador is sometimes especially effective, much beyond the norm or average. At his best, he is an active agent of change. There are those who seize windows of opportunity, to advance national interests in the political, economic and other fields in a tangible way, with measurable results. These are the envoys remembered much after their time. It should be the goal of a good diplomatic system to offer opportunities for excellence and leadership for their envoys.

Inevitably, there are instances of the opposite kind—surely more in number—of ambassadors who have performed in a routine fashion, unimaginatively following instructions and procedures, opting for the path of least resistance. They do not offer instruction. When initiatives are not taken, or where the envoy has functioned in a reactive manner, one can only estimate the missed opportunities hypothetically, since one lacks viable evidence. This book sketches the work environment that is theirs as well. The challenge for every diplomatic service and for the other public services as well, is to create conditions where average performance is raised, and those who tend to be reactive, learn the proactive way.

One of the goals of this book is to identify success methods, and to see if these are capable of being emulated and replicated. With the exception of the European Union, which has extended the foreign policy integration process to include regular dialogue among MFA heads of administration, there is a limited sharing of experiences, or of emulation, in the diplomatic profession. One result of this study might be to awaken interest in different countries in such a comparative analysis of the diplomatic process.

We should not ignore the envoys who commit transgressions of a personal character, or more rarely, of a professional nature. Interestingly, experience shows that the damage that results from

such incidents seldom endures for long. Host countries are generally relieved at the end of an episode involving inappropriate conduct by a foreign envoy, and seldom perceive or find deliberate design in such incidents. That said, very exceptional situations also occur, where offensive behavior by an envoy is used as an instrument of policy. Such rarities take place when there are problems or a conflict between states.

### New Responsibilities

Subsequent chapters look in detail at the work of the ambassador, his partners, the operational sectors, his role within the embassy and *vis-à-vis* the home authorities, and the need for training. For the present, let us depict in broad brush-strokes the consequences of the major trends narrated above. What is their collective impact on the essential role of the ambassador?

As far back as 1970, a US State Department memo had talked of diplomacy needing 'a new breed of diplomat-managers'.<sup>32</sup> The ambassador has now grown in vocation as the 'relationship manager' in the country of assignment, even if this is not fully understood as yet. He emerges as the country's best resource, in terms of the totality of the concerned bilateral relationship. No territorial division or bureau in the MFA—or 'country director'—is able to keep track of sectoral activity or the actions of functional ministries and the non-state actors in the target country. Further, the MFA lacks the inclination, manpower and information sources to engage in this kind of micro-management—though one would prefer to call it mastery of detail and visualization of the grand mosaic. The MFA has to be satisfied if other ministries and official agencies keep it in the picture in relation to major developments and actions undertaken by them, and if it is able to coordinate with them their principal actions. The MFA overview of the activities of non-official actors is even less comprehensive. Consequently, the embassy becomes the single best provider, in real time, of total activity in the target country. We presuppose that the ambassador and his team are on the ball, and have cultivated the essential outreach, in the receiving country and at home, to perform this role. I have presented

this thesis over the past three years in other writings, and found in mid-2002 that the German Paschke Report comes to almost an identical set of conclusions.<sup>33</sup>

Personal trust and credibility are the vital assets in the envoy's armory which govern his contacts at all levels. They give access to networking contacts, information, a persuasive presentation of his own viewpoints, plus application of linkages, trade-offs and leverage. A person is believed if he or she has a reputation for straight dealing. Often, the interlocutor has a margin of action, to act as the envoy asks, and there is always some kind of risk in doing so. That is where credibility and trust help to swing the balance. It is only the resident envoy who has the possibility of developing the requisite relationships, and taking advantage of transitory opportunities, as elaborated subsequently.

Several consequences follow. The ambassador becomes the best adviser on not just local developments in the country of assignment, but for providing a holistic perspective of the complete bilateral relationship, taking into account the official and non-state levels, at both ends of the game. It becomes vital for the diplomatic system to consult him on all aspects of policy and tactics. Modern communications technology makes this permanent consultation feasible in a way that previous generations of envoys could not have dreamt. In particular, with his 'integrated' perspective, the ambassador is able to suggest to his government the areas in which trade-offs, inducements and leverage are available, and indicate the ways in which these can be used, in dealing with a partner country. He has other advantages as well. On the ground it is easier for him to cross-check with local non-MFA partners, or obtain bits of corroborating information, feeding in this information to the home foreign ministry. Finally, the presence of other ministries from home in the large embassy also enhances the coordination role, provided the ambassador has established sound working relationships within his entire team. He does this not by 'right' or status, but through winning their confidence. It follows that this kind of integrated role is more feasible at a larger mission than in a smaller one, which generally corresponds to the level of bilateral engagement with foreign countries.

In earlier writings I had likened the ambassador to a 'systems engineer', a professional who is not necessarily the master of every process that is in play, but like the systems engineer in a complex petro-chemical plant (which is an agglomeration of dozens of separate units and sub-units, with different processes functioning in a continuous chain), he understands the relationship of each to the other.<sup>34</sup> He is able to take an overview and help make the entire system function optimally. That is his role in relationship management, interrelating discrete components, tying them together and producing maximum value.

This breadth of knowledge also makes him a 'catalyst', as some have described this function.<sup>35</sup> He is a potential source of innovative ideas, perhaps the best one in the system. His colleagues at the MFA are generally over-preoccupied with classic headquarter functions, (typically covering the examination of day-to-day issues, the application and interpretation of policy, the brief preparation for ministers, digestion of reports, and responses to demands for briefings, inter-agency coordination, parliamentary work and the like). They lack the ambassador's single-focus or tunnel vision, honed on the bilateral relationship.

This mono-focus also produces its drawbacks. There are problems of excessive concern with one's own parish, which can develop into a full-blown case of what is called 'localitis'—a conviction that one's place of assignment is the center of the universe. It is precisely for these reasons that the ambassador and his team function continually under close supervision of the MFA, with the territorial division acting as the lead or 'parent' agency. This supervision needs to be effective, especially to monitor performance. The goal of headquarters should not be to judge or to apply sanctions—though this is a byproduct of the monitoring process, in any event. The deeper aim is to raise performance levels of ambassadors and their teams, and to improve the delivery capacity at the median level. The envoy too has to continually cultivate balance and sound judgment that provides the foundation of his credibility at home.

Where does this leave the ambassador in his historical legacy? Among the leading diplomacy states, the US has a special tradition of ambassadors drawn from public life. After all, of the very first

eight presidents, five had once headed US diplomatic missions in Europe. This demonstrates the origin of the system of non-professional appointments that has partly degenerated into a crude spoils system of rewarding contributors to political campaigns. It may be this public policy origin that has led the US to have higher expectations of the ambassador than elsewhere. A 1981 Senate report on 'The Ambassador in US Foreign Policy' examined the notion that he had become an anachronism, and stated: '[He] no longer plays a meaningful role in developing or even managing American foreign policy...he is seen merely as the tool for its implementation, and is told via satellite [encoded cables] what is expected of him.'<sup>36</sup> Most countries do not traditionally expect the ambassador to play a sizable role in developing foreign policy in any event, and regard him as one who implements instructions, and may see nothing wrong with the way he has been described above. But as this study argues, the reality is quite different.

The ambassador's 'plenipotentiary powers' have long withered away. It can be argued that the quasi-autonomous role implied in that phrase was seldom reality anyway, once new communications developed more than a century ago, i.e. the telegraph and radio links that made it possible to instantaneously transmit instructions and receive reports. This abolished the earlier penumbra zone of suspended animation, the transit delay in two-way communication, which gave the envoy some local autonomy. Today, the more apt analogy for the envoy is with the chief executive of a country unit of a transnational enterprise. Like this corporate leader, the ambassador enjoys a mastery of the local scene, an authority over the country team, and an ability to function as the best adviser to the headquarters or the holding company. His true value is that of a principal adviser on the overall policy that should apply at that location, within the framework of headquarters vision and strategy. He also executes approved policy on the ground and manages that delivery process, being held accountable for results.

The chief executive analogy is also suitable as it sheds the baggage of pomp and concentrates on the promotion, outreach, negotiation, feedback, management and servicing functions (these six are the principal functions of contemporary diplomacy, as elaborated in

Chapter 3). The envoy is not the master of the entire enterprise, if we relate him to the full foreign policy and diplomacy apparatus of the country. One could argue that even the foreign minister does not play that role, since the head of government is almost always more directly involved in external affairs than before. Be as it may, for our purpose the ambassador is the first one responsible for a particular bilateral relationship, and is comparable to the chief manager of the country CEO.

### Bilateral and Multilateral Envoys

The great majority of ambassadors on full-time assignment resident abroad engage in classic diplomacy, at bilateral posts, representing the sending state in a foreign country. In 1999 there were about 7700 of them, an average of 41 ambassadors in each of the world's capitals.<sup>37</sup> The figure is always a little fluid, but is not subject to large variation. There are places where embassies lie closed on account of war, major local upheaval or breakdown in law and order (as has happened recently in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan, but resident embassies have gradually reopened at each places). In East Timor, after its independence in May 2002, just a few states have established embassies. We ignore the usually temporary situation where some embassies are headed by a chargé d' affaires *ad interim*, at any point in time. We also ignore 'concurrent representation', where one ambassador also handles representation in one or more neighboring countries. Roving ambassadors are actually like heads of task forces, charged with particular functional issues. Like 'non-resident ambassadors' described elsewhere, they generally operate from the home country capital.

The other kind of ambassador is the multilateral envoy, customarily called a permanent representative (PR), accredited to the UN or a specialized agencies or some international organization. New York has 190 of them, one virtually for every member-country; at the other major UN center Geneva, the number is about 130. We should also take into account the full-time permanent representatives to agencies such as UNESCO and OECD in Paris, FAO in Rome, IAEA in Vienna and others. Factor in also the full-time permanent

representatives like the ones to the EU and NATO at Brussels, and we come to a figure of about 600 multilateral ambassadors. (Some countries give a personal rank of ambassador to deputy permanent representatives, but it is the PR who is the head of mission.)

Some ambassadors handle both bilateral and multilateral work, if a country has a single mission abroad that deals both with the host country and any international agency located there. They may concentrate on bilateral work; treating the other responsibility as secondary. This happens typically at Nairobi, in relation to multilateral work at UNEP and HABITAT, or in Rome in relation to FAO. But at Vienna, IAEA and UNIDO responsibilities have overtaken bilateral work for many that have combined missions. At Brussels, EU work takes precedence over bilateral accreditation to the Belgian government, for those that have combined missions.<sup>38</sup>

The ambassador we study in this book is primarily a bilateral envoy responsible for advancing the home country's interests in a single foreign country. The work of the multilateral ambassador, whether handled by a full-time permanent representative or by one who puts on that hat as needed, is sufficiently distinct to warrant separate examination (Chapter 4). We will also consider in that case if multilateral work is to be recognized as a specialized variant of the genre.

## 2

## RITUAL AND FORM

In diplomacy, appearance is inseparable from function. The public face and image are among the tools the ambassador uses to reach his objectives. For instance, the professional access that he or she enjoys is as much dependent on the glamour and attractiveness of his receptions or dinners, as to his diplomatic skills.<sup>1</sup> At capitals like London, Paris or Washington DC, each with a massive diplomatic corps of 150 to 170 resident embassies, leading to intense mutual competition for access to the powerful, such an aura of style and *savoir faire* produces result. Success, in a word, breeds success. At the more remote locations too, the public image that the ambassador projects is a source of influence, with tactics tailored to the situation.

## Protocol and Ceremonial

Protocol is defined as the 'rules of diplomatic procedure'.<sup>2</sup> It evolved as a set of customary practices enforcing standards and the uniform treatment for envoys sent abroad by states, large and small, as personal representatives of their monarchs and presidents. The Vienna Congress of 1815 laid down the principle of equality among them. Precedence among foreign ambassadors in any capital is determined exclusively by the date of the presentation of credentials—with the single exception noted below. Reciprocity is the principle

of the 'EU Foreign Policy Chief' in 2001, have been visible signs of this process. How does this affect the role of the ambassador?

The German Paschke Report of 2000 has had some influence on other EU states—which have endorsed its conclusion that the European unification process has changed the responsibilities of EU ambassadors and led to the emergence of 'a new type of European diplomacy with its own functions and characteristics'. An academic study of foreign ministries in EU countries published in 2002 concludes that while trends in the countries studied are not altogether clear, the notion that MFAs are in irreversible decline ignores their considerable adaptive capacity, and the most agile of them are shifting to a new role as 'spanners of boundaries', providing renewed value.<sup>1</sup> The study examines particularly the MFA's situation in the member countries in intra-government interactions, and in Brussels in terms of the role of the permanent representatives heading the mammoth missions that each EU state maintains at the EU headquarters. But we await an EU-wide study of the ambassador system, as also of the operation of the global system of EU diplomatic representation.

A concept often discussed in Europe but yet to see the light of day is the 'joint embassy'—one envoy representing multiple states. It would save resources, financial and human, and enable wider diplomatic coverage around the world. It would also be a unique demonstration of mutual trust and cooperation. One might have expected that the European Union, a unified entity in which states have partly pooled their sovereignty, might be an early mover. Yet, the small Caribbean island states are the only ones to have put this into practice, e.g. through an ambassador at Ottawa who represents eight 'Caricom' states.<sup>2</sup>

One problem has been the concept that the ambassador represents the head of state of a sovereign nation. Germany has been the first with a law that permits such joint representation. Other EU states are in the process of passing the enabling legislation, but the formula is difficult for constitutional monarchies. The first of the joint EU ambassadors will probably represent those countries that are ready to try it, as one more act of variable geometry. Clearly, joint ambassadors may be feasible in places where the interests of

## 8

## THE FUTURE

Do we foresee a day when the system of resident ambassadors will end? Might changes in the international system, or technology, or other developments radically transform the way envoys are deployed abroad?

No state has seriously considered replacing the ambassador as the prime, permanent channel of contact and relationship promotion with foreign countries. This institution remains the first instrument for advancing external interests. Some scholars assert that the resident envoy is a major constituent of the international system. In today's prolific community of states and their incessant, pluri-issue multiple-level international dialogue, this institution has undergone a continuous adaptation. Therefore, we should focus on a likely evolution, rather than build artificial scenarios of extinction. These changes cover the structures, functioning, and training needs covered in earlier chapters.

## EU Experience

The European Union's political engineering—the continuing 'deepening' of unification exemplified in the proposed constitution, plus the dramatic 'widening' from 15 members to 25 in 2004, and more around the corner—extends also to the diplomatic system and its methods. In foreign affairs, the implementation of the 'Common Foreign and Security Policy' (CFSP), and the appointment

participating states are limited, and where none perceives special connections—it would be hard to imagine a joint EU ambassador with French participation in francophone Africa.

One should also look at the current formula of the EU Representative as exists in some 70 countries outside the EU. Bearing the title of 'ambassador', these representatives belong to the EU's burgeoning diplomatic service and act as administrators of EU aid, and as coordinators of EU activities in the receiving country. Might they serve as joint envoys for the EU at remote locations? Possible, but again the concept would come up against the particular interests of major European states, e.g. in the commercial arena.

Even the limited formula of 'co-location', placing missions of several countries together, to share services, has produced limited results. It was tried at Abuja, the new Nigerian capital, but the result was inconclusive. Against what was to be a single complex housing all 15 EU states, several opted for their own locations of choice, and only 6 were left in the joint complex. Germany, an advocate of joint action, is engaged in around a dozen co-location projects around the world, with one or more EU partners,<sup>3</sup> the UK, France and the Nordics are also strong advocates. The other form in which joint EU action takes place is at the micro level, with embassies in foreign capitals coming together to write joint reports, and exchanging diplomats to work in one another's embassies—which matches similar personnel exchanges at the EU capitals.

In all these moves, a collective EU entity takes more substantive shape, in a progressive and measured manner. A 'Europe of States', where a number of member-states are unwilling to pool sovereignty beyond the point where their identity is threatened, is unlikely to abandon the national system of diplomatic representation. And there is no other large regional or collective entity that is at the stage of comprehensive replacement of the ambassador representing the sovereign state.

### The Entrepreneur-Ambassador

One of the attributes of an entrepreneur is to generate and manage innovation within an existing set of circumstances. That core

entrepreneurial function is as applicable in public affairs as it is to business. One way of understanding excellence and leadership in diplomacy is through this model. Four entrepreneur-envoy cases from the establishment best known to the author, the Indian Foreign Service, are offered. Each has involved blending political, economic and other forms of public interest entrepreneurship, guided by an individual's perception of advancing national interests.

N. Krishnan.<sup>4</sup> He was the permanent representative in Geneva in 1967–71 when the emerging global scourge of man-made drugs, the 'psychotropic substances'<sup>5</sup> was first debated at the UN Narcotics Commission. In 1967, when the global spread of these substances was detected, the shared position of the major powers, influenced by their pharmaceutical industry, was that international regulation was unnecessary; it should be left to each country to decide on its control regime. Sweden vehemently opposed such *laissez faire*. India had no brief on the issue, nor was it then a national problem, but Krishnan and delegation leader D.P. Anand<sup>6</sup> crafted their own brief, also persuading the Ghana delegate to join. For the next several years, these three countries argued the case for unified action, through the customary meanderings of multilateral diplomacy, when the big powers preferred procrastination. Eventually, the changing contours of the drug problem in their countries, plus the shifting public mood post-1968, forced a change from within each. Subsequent negotiations culminated in the UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances signed in Vienna in 1974. At that time, international NGO power did not exist and public consciousness of such issues was muted. Idealism and practical diplomacy won out.

Ranjit Gupta.<sup>7</sup> As Ambassador to Oman in 1989–94, he vigorously championed several ambitious joint venture projects, including a one billion dollar fertilizer project (which achieved financial closure in 2002 and is under execution), two refineries which were later abandoned, and a planned undersea gas pipeline across the Arabian Sea that never took off, later abandoned as unviable owing to cost and technical hurdles, because of the deep sea-bed to be traversed. He has subsequently explained to the author his rationale for pushing this proposal, in terms of a political need to project the Indian eco-political reach in the Gulf, as also to encourage Iran and other

Gulf states of the potential for bold actions. Later, as Ambassador to Thailand (1994–98) he co-authored with Thailand a proposal for trans-regional economic cooperation, BIMST-EC, pushing a reluctant home bureaucracy into acceptance, after gaining high level endorsement in New Delhi. The concept has gathered strength over the years; the leaders of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand, plus new entrants Bhutan and Nepal, are to hold their first summit in early 2004.

Shiv Shankar Menon.<sup>8</sup> He has been a master of quiet political diplomacy, with an unassuming style. Both in Sri Lanka (1997–2000) and China (2001–03), he played a critical role in building external and internal consensus in favor of reworked bilateral ties, a model of quiet political outreach. Continuing his exceptional experience with high diplomacy, he has been High Commissioner in Pakistan since July 2003. At each of these three countries, his assignment has coincided with a remarkable, evolutionary transformation in bilateral relations. While a serving official's contribution in a complex political process is hard to pinpoint from outside, he surely meets Napoleon's norm of that desirable 'lucky general'.

Leela Ponappa.<sup>9</sup> Another serving official, she is known to be persuasive, combining high integrity with a low profile. She crafted the pioneering India–Thailand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that was signed in October 2003, utilizing her experience with India's first FTA with Sri Lanka in 1998–99, when she headed the territorial division in the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi. She has been especially skillful at networking diplomacy, reconciling inter-ministerial interests in New Delhi, showing also that all too often the hardest negotiation task can be at home!

The 'public entrepreneur' envoys described here, and their counterparts that exist in other countries, blend proactivism with judgment and persuasive skills to implement their goals. They import into their work the methods, the mindset and the tools of a good business entrepreneur. In particular, they confront near-identical calculations of risk and gain. But unlike entrepreneur-owners in the business world, they are not autonomous. In this respect too, the envoy resembles a trans-national corporation chief executive heading a country subsidiary, who enjoys a considerable

latitude of action, but remains answerable to higher management.

What are the effective envoy's operational parameters? First, he retains a significant latitude for local initiative. The headquarters sets the goals, and provides the resources, but the local environment is for the envoy to comprehend and master. He looks for windows of opportunity, makes connections between disparate issues, and works to both short-term and long-term priorities, to sustain, build, diversify, deepen and embellish relationships in the country of assignment, in pursuit of national objectives. Often, opportunities have to be developed through local actions. He needs to discern the actions he can undertake on his own and the others where he needs the prior approval of headquarters. Second, he deals in public goods and services. Some of these are tangible, be they exports from home, the mobilization of investments in either direction, or the creation of cultural, scientific, educational or other connections. Others, like improved political understanding or a more positive country image are less concrete, hard to measure. But they are all amenable to entrepreneurial action. Third, he depends on proactive methods, asserting leadership over both those under his direct charge, and others whom he can influence or motivate, both in the country of assignment and at home. If anything, he pursues a wider model of leadership behavior than might apply to a business leader, but quite similar to leadership in public life. Fourth, economic and public diplomacy are particularly amenable to entrepreneurial methods, though that spirit applies to the other activity areas as well. In particular, openness to new ideas and innovation are a unifying common thread. Fifth, the ambassador takes personal responsibility for the mission's performance, taking both credit and blame as merited. The instructions that he receives from his headquarters, plus its consultation–decision mechanism to which he has access at most times, help him, but do not provide a valid alibi if things go wrong. Sixth, as in business, public service entrepreneurship involves rising above the difficulties as they exist in a given situation, and stretching the envelope of the possible, not wasting energy on the unattainable, or awaiting change in the framework conditions.

Applying such a business model reveals one vital aspect of diplomacy—the inherent trade-off between risk and potential gain.

Any new initiative or pursuit of opportunity involves both advantage and potential for failure. Judgment and good decisions come from knowledge, training and experience. Of course, the ambassador is not alone in shouldering risk; he works within a support system that assists, checks, and evaluates. He has the foreign ministry and the full machinery of the government, to guide and advise in circumstances of doubt. But there are many situations where the envoy has to sponsor a proposal or to act, where an entrepreneurial mindset is rather appropriate.

It is dangerous to pursue the comparison too far. Balance and good judgment, the indispensable allies of the envoy, temper his entrepreneurial spirit. A static environment may offer no opportunity for proactivism. If conditions in the receiving state are adverse, obviously new initiatives have to wait, and the ambassador may have his hands full with containing the situation. Further, if one's private agenda supplants the public interest, the envoy would come to resemble the businessman in ways that are far from desirable. This has become a real risk with the contemporary growth of economic diplomacy, in which the promotional activities, and advocacy of business interests of home country enterprises, expose all diplomats in the field, especially the ambassador, to temptations that could scarcely have been imagined a generation earlier.

### Power and Influence

'Power is the ability to obtain the outcomes one wants', (Joseph S. Nye Jr.).<sup>10</sup> What real power does today's ambassador enjoy? On the surface he does not measure up to the envoys of the past who were real plenipotentiaries, and seemed to shape events abroad and influence international affairs. But examined closely, quasi-autonomous ambassadorial authority passed into history long back, as soon as national capitals discovered instant communication, initially via the telegraph, and subsequently in all its technological derivatives. Even during the inter-War years of 1919-39, marked by complex inter-state moves in Europe and at the League of Nations, now seen as a classic era of diplomacy, the envoy played

a circumscribed role.<sup>11</sup> Today's ambassador is a civil servant in all respects, even if some countries bestow personal ranks like 'cabinet status' on non-career envoys. Such frills mean nothing in substantive international contacts, and do not lead to power.<sup>12</sup> It is more instructive to examine the envoy's *influence*, his ability to induce or to function with others towards the outcomes he attempts to promote. In terms of hard power, the ambassador has but little at his disposal.

In gauging the envoy's influence, we may summarize the narrative of earlier chapters. First, he is a contributor to the shaping of policy, besides his larger role as the field agent implementing that policy. In the increasingly plural diplomatic process, he has competitors, but the evolution of communications technology has unexpectedly led to his capacity for integration into the decision and policy formulation chain. The extent to which this actually happens depends on the country's diplomatic system and the willingness of that system to harness the latent possibility of using the envoy in a way that overcomes most of the barriers of geography. How far can the envoy assert his viewpoint? It depends on the country and circumstances; we know of instances where individuals have exerted an unusual degree of influence, virtually shaping the policy towards a particular foreign country.

Second, plurality, multiplicity and complexity in international discourse—in players, issues and processes—makes the resident ambassador the country's single best resource on the assigned country. The same is true of the multilateral envoy in relation to the international organization to which he is accredited. Again, this is a capacity that has to be exercised within the working structure and environment of the diplomatic system. If this is not handled with adroitness and balance, the potential remains unexploited.

Third, everything hinges on the individual. Not all ambassadors are able to deliver on the potential. It should logically follow that countries deploy their best talent at the capitals that truly matter to them, but all too often, this does not happen. The inhibiting factors can be a mix of poor HR deployment, defective systems of promotion and motivation, or simply poor governance of the diplomatic process. For any diplomatic service, it is vital to celebrate



the role models, not so much for the recognition that they merit but for the influence these models exercise on others, raising both expectations and capabilities.

So, how influential is the envoy? Fairly influential, especially in his capacity to do good and to deliver on exploiting the beneficial potential of a bilateral relationship. But he can function to his capacity only if the entire system and its processes are optimized.

### Globalized Diplomacy

G.R. Berridge writes: 'A diplomatic service that is well resourced and above all well staffed can give a state a significant increment of power and influence.'<sup>13</sup> This simple truth needs better recognition in different parts of the world, especially in the global South. It also underscores the importance of the study of the diplomatic process, as a force multiplier in international affairs.

The conclusions of this study are summarized below.

First, *we observe the salience of the ambassador as an institution.* The present state of world politics requires countries to practice globalized diplomacy. Its characteristics are: it is *intensive*, in that the engagement with high priority partners is deep, growing continually to exploit the full potential of mutually beneficial cooperation (example: The EU has become an aspiration model for other regional organizations, be it ASEAN or the OAU, for the manner in which the voluntary pooling of sovereignty can produce mutual benefit.) It is *extensive*, in that each country reaches out to distant regions to forge new partnerships (example: In 2002, Brazil, India and South Africa, as three large countries in different continents, decided to intensify economic and other exchanges, to forge new political linkages; one manifestation was their joint action at the September 2003 WTO Ministerial Meeting, Cancun.) It is *innovative*, seeking out-of-the-box solutions to festering problems, or to isolate these, unblocking other initiatives (example: The Anglo-Irish Good Friday Accord of 1998, which leaves open the future status of Northern Ireland, within a framework safeguarding the vital interests of each state and all its constituencies.) It is *regional* in that the cultivation of one's neighborhood is always the high priority

(example: With the regional body SAARC in paralysis owing to seemingly intractable India-Pakistan differences, the smaller South Asian countries are turning to other bilateral and cross-regional options like bilateral free trade agreements and 'Ganga-Mekong Basin' concepts).<sup>14</sup>

The institution of the ambassador is shaped by a wide matrix of factors, as they interact with one another. The envoy is the prime instrument of outreach and promotion in relationship building in bilateral diplomacy and the permanent negotiator in multilateral diplomacy. He also plays a vital role in the public-private networks that operate in the different functional areas of international dialogue, supplementing the work of the foreign ministry as the external affairs coordinator.

An expanded role for the envoy valorizes also the concept that he serves the entire system of government, not excluding the non-state actors. The foreign ministry, in nurturing the envoy as a value-provider for the full national system, also improves his capacity for direct and indirect service to all these constituents. In turn, the ambassador contributes to the discharge of the MFA's expanding obligations to them, whether we call this external affairs coordination or 'boundary-spanning'.<sup>15</sup>

Second, *maximizing value out of the ambassador system should be a national goal.* The action remit and responsibility of the ambassador has become larger, even while he is more tightly integrated into the foreign affairs structure. Some of his autonomy—more notional than real anyway—has been traded, in return he has gained involvement in a wider range of issues. For instance, he cedes negotiation competence, in areas other than political, to the functional experts, but needs to master greater complexity. He must adapt his vision to be able to view both the trees and the forest.

In the future, we should expect harder calculations by countries in determining external priorities, extending to the distribution and density of the diplomatic network. This may lead to a scaling back in the number of embassies abroad and a thinning down of staff for most. 'Status competition', among great and lesser powers has surely contributed to a situation where many maintain resident ambassadors in countries of peripheral interest. The crunch of financial resources

and governance rationalization will help this process. So will information and communication technology. New possibilities include: non-resident ambassadors, 'virtual' envoys, and micro-embassies and sub-offices—some staffed entirely by local personnel—as noted earlier. This is underway in some countries (e.g. Italy has reduced its embassy strength from 124 in 1994 to 118 in 2000), Japan, in the midst of major diplomatic structural reforms is also set to cut back on the number of missions. Such moves always face resistance from entrenched diplomatic services, quite acute in some countries.<sup>16</sup> Technology also facilitates leaner embassies, much of consular work and some commercial work shifted to back-offices at home, visible in some systems.

We noted earlier German efforts in adapting procedures to the present international environment. Others like Australia, France, New Zealand, Singapore and the UK have also pursued innovative methods. Several have thinned out their foreign representation, closing marginal embassies, or cutting back sharply on home-based personnel at places where interests can be handled in different ways. In parallel, there is a consistent shift to a more intensive use of locally recruited staff.

One possibility is the 'regional ambassador' who may be based in a large country in a particular region, to supervise small 'satellite embassies' in neighboring countries which could be headed by resident chargé d'affaires (this is different from the concurrent accreditation formula, where there is no physical presence in the second capital covered by the envoy). This idea comes up from time to time in some countries. The drawback in this concept is that the regional envoy becomes an intermediate level between the mission on the ground and the foreign ministry, which would surely create more problems than it solves.<sup>17</sup>

Some countries will probably deploy more multilateral envoys, dictated especially by expanding economic and other functional tasks, be it at WTO in Geneva, or at the other specialized agencies that dominate international affairs. The management of multilateral diplomacy is expected to remain in the hands of MFA professionals, while specialists handle the negotiation of technical issues.<sup>18</sup> Regional diplomacy would also command increased attention, with professionals remaining in the driving seat. At the same time, in

the mix of work handled by foreign ministries, a swing back to bilateral diplomacy is overdue, revalued in its own right, without taking anything away from multilaterals.<sup>19</sup>

Third, *improvements in the diplomacy process must be viewed as a public good*. Producing optimal value from ambassadors, today and tomorrow, demands changes in the ways they are utilized by the diplomatic system. Traditionally, the ambassador was seen by the MFA as 'their man' providing inputs into a decision-making process that valued his contributions, but did not directly include him in the policy chain. Different diplomatic services can attest to the 'us-and-them' mindsets that often prevail at headquarters, despite the fact that the same officials serve in embassies and MFAs. As detailed earlier, there are good reasons for treating the ambassador and his team more integrally. First, he and his team are the very best information source on his country of assignment, unmatched by anyone at headquarters. Second, the envoy has the capacity to find interconnections between different areas of activity, of the non-obvious kind, yielding leverages and trade-off possibilities. Third, the communications revolution has eroded distance as a conditioning factor and now lets the diplomatic system use him as an integral team member in the decision process.<sup>20</sup> A citation from the German Paschke Report offered in Chapter 5 underscores this.

Is the process described above actually happening anywhere? Only in part. One reason may be that the 'relationship manager role' is a consequence of a gradual, dynamic process, not a sudden event, and for that reason has not attracted sharper notice. An experienced German diplomat, Berndt von Staden, had commented some years back:

The ambassador is increasingly becoming the head of a 'service enterprise' responsible for preparing and carrying out... direct intercourse between his government and that of the host country... Most of the negotiation functions that once devolved upon the ambassador have disappeared. But at the same time the tasks of persuasion and interpretation have grown to an equal or greater extent.<sup>21</sup>

In an interview, a Western ambassador agreed with the author's analysis, but was skeptical if foreign ministries would allow this kind of intrusion on what was perceived as their area of jurisdiction; he

felt that a competent ambassador should manage to get himself involved in the decision process, but this may not happen as a matter of right.<sup>22</sup> A couple of the contributors to a 2002 study on EU foreign ministries have forcefully asserted that embassies are more actively integrated with the MFA, in the concluding essay, co-editor Brian Hocking notes that this is facilitated by contemporary information and communications technology and adds: 'The general verdict is that embassies are increasingly involved in the shaping as well as interpretation of policy.'<sup>23</sup> The German Foreign Office has implemented this aspect of the Paschke Report, to the point where the computer networks in the ministry and missions are integrated. Ambassadors and their teams interface seamlessly with ministry counterparts, with documents and comments exchanged continually. The same is true of the US, where the direct message from the envoy to home official becomes a new communication device, since it is not circulated to others, unlike cipher messages.

Fourth, *better recognition of the diplomatist as a professional is worthwhile*. The professionalism of the diplomatic system has grown in response to changed functions, in a process that is also linked with the tighter integration of the entire machine with the other stakeholders in external affairs. When it works well, it becomes a virtuous circle, providing feedback into the process itself. The extent to which this happens hinges, partly, on the ambassador system delivering stronger value, as perceived by domestic partners, state and non-state.

This also demands revitalized training, constantly adapting it in line with an evolution in functional needs. With a porous domestic-external divide, the envoy needs exposure to the domestic governance process, and an inclusion in the dialogue that foreign ministries undertake with the home constituencies relevant to his work. Instituting a regular training program for ambassadors, where officials of other external-oriented ministries and non-state constituencies also join, is the most efficient method for pulling together the diverse themes that should be covered in such programs.

Fifth, *a transformation process is underway in well-managed foreign ministries*. The management of the diplomatic machine has emerged as a major challenge. Several interlocking factors are responsible

for this. First, governments all over the world confront a demand for better efficiency and value-for-money from public services. Optimizing the way external relations are handled is one of many parallel concerns. Second, new management techniques have permeated all fields of activity, starting with the corporate domain and extending to social institutions, the voluntary sector and the public agencies. The techniques themselves have undergone rapid evolution and refinement. Third, we see the diplomatic process with new eyes, and begin to recognize that it is intertwined with policy in a way that defies simple differentiation. Reform of the foreign ministry process gathers momentum in capitals as different as Berlin and Beijing. Fourth, it is slowly understood that the gap between productive diplomatic systems and those marked by stasis and inefficiency is largely one of management—plus training—and not resources. A few developing countries have understood this truth, and this has, hopefully, a cascading effect.

How else should foreign ministries adapt themselves? Knowledge management is increasingly vital for organizations. One task is to tap the knowledge and learning that reside in the organization, and institutionalize the process through which these are harvested. The profusion of reports and dispatches that ambassadors submit should be archived digitally, and through use of hypertext and keyword search, should be accessible across the headquarters and embassies abroad. (The practical obstacle is the security of such system-wide IT networks.) Most diplomatic systems do not as yet treat knowledge management as a core function. The rapid evolution in the external environment makes this especially vital. Another priority should be the study of other systems, to identify best practices and to benchmark one's system against the peer services. This is beginning to take place and should gain further momentum in the years ahead.<sup>24</sup> Improved communication with domestic publics on foreign policy goals, and frequent, comprehensive dialogue with the foreign affairs community is another requirement, as a form of public diplomacy at home. The ambassador is a cog in all these activities.

Reform in foreign ministries and in the diplomatic systems that they manage, is taking place in many countries. The international environment and the velocity of transformation in global affairs

make it essential for foreign ministries to build change management into the system.

Finally, *high performance by ambassadors hinges on empowering individuals*. The foreign ministry and the rest of the government party create the environment that regulates the diplomatic machine. The techniques of performance management and human resource management animate the system, encouraging officials and building an enabling environment. But the ambassador depends on self-initiative to deliver his best in the kaleidoscopic, multilayered environment where he functions. The incubation of entrepreneurship is a human process, not a matter of rules and supervision—even while these create the vital conditions where the envoy can function creatively in pursuit of the country's external interests. The evolution taking place in the operation of the ambassador system gives the possibility of integrating the field and the center, into a near-seamless entity, working to a higher efficiency than before.

The best diplomatic systems produce exemplars that inspire the entire system. The uniqueness of the environment in each foreign country, the very personal way in which envoys go about building trust, reaching out to external and domestic constituencies, gives this profession its craft character, where almost no work is routine or mechanical, or capable of being reduced to set formulae. It is a profession that celebrates individuality. The challenge for the diplomatic system is to build excellence into its genetic code, and to uplift the performance of the entire system as well. At stake is nothing less than enlarging the international power and influence of one's nation.

## NOTES

### Introduction

1. An extract from an informal note given to me by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand.
2. A few other instances: in UK the top decision-making body at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is called the 'Board of Management'; business management principles are also applied to the operation of important projects such as 'Invest Britain' that represent the cutting edge of the country's economic diplomacy. New Zealand calls the head of the foreign ministry 'chief executive officer' and applies a series of other business methods to the management of performance and human resources.
3. L.N. Rangarajan, *The Arthashastra* (Penguin, New Delhi, 1992). This is an excellent work of translation and rearrangement, accompanied by an introduction that makes this classic work easily accessible.
4. Rangarajan, *The Arthashastra*, p. 576-8.
5. Abraham de Wicquefort, *The Ambassador and his Functions*, 1681, translated by Digby in 1716 (facsimile edition, University of Leicester, 1997).
6. While serving in the Canadian diplomatic service, Justin Robertson edited the collection *Foreign Ministries in Developing Countries and Emerging Market Economies* (Halifax, *International Insights: Dalhousie Journal of International Affairs*, Volume 14, Summer, 1998). It focuses on the experience of countries that do not often figure in comparative international studies.