

Crises in World Politics

TARAK BARKAWI
BRENDAN SIMMS
editors

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MARK ETHERINGTON
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CARNE ROSS

Spies & Diplomats

Independent Diplomat

Dispatches from an Unaccountable Elite

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reinforced in the organs of diplomacy, such as the British Foreign Office, that the morality of the state, which is a form of immorality, is seen as superior to personal morality (*raison d'état* etc. etc.). This creates the possibility of bad, immoral policy such as sanctions on Iraq, or the Security Council's treatment of the Western Sahara, which make perfect sense in the "realist" security-centred way of thinking, but very little moral sense in terms of minimising human suffering or resolving disputes. Ordinary government servants, who lack the elevated status of diplomats, and who tend to be closer to the concerns of ordinary people, one hopes, are better immunised against this amoral sensibility.

9. While we are not about to get rid of the state, we should recognise the importance of, and give more weight to, the many other actors involved in international affairs. The existence of diplomats at the top of the pile tends to squeeze out these other actors, to the detriment of inclusive and thus effective policy-making. Governments like to think that they are in charge of world events. Diplomats exist, and have a strong self-interest, in reaffirming this simplistic world view. Their dispatches and telegrams (even today, as you will see when they are eventually released) are full of grandiose statements about how this or that world problem might be solved (the omnipotent "we" again). This flatters the egos of the politicians whom they serve; it flatters their own egos. But they are wrong. Governments and diplomats are as much (if not more) impotent witnesses to world events as they are instigators. History suggests that even the ultimate preserve of government — war-making — has myriad and unpredictable antecedents and consequences. Governments are far from wholly in charge. The organisation of

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government internationally and of international affairs generally should better reflect this reality.

We will still need embassies to organise ministers' visits and after distressed travellers who lose their passports (indeed, as *isn't swells*, we will doubtless need more). There's no reason embassies cannot still try to provide good on-the-ground access of what's going on, despite their inevitable limitations (indeed, need is all the greater as decision-making is concentrated in *and the remove from reality increases*). But already in the European Union (EU), the embassies of other EU members are becoming terminals for visiting delegations of home government secretaries and ministers as they visit their opposite numbers in ever-increasing numbers. Groups of businesspeople come and go, using the *bassy* as they would an exclusive club, to impress their contacts and business contacts (government-favoured businesses, and the arms industry, tend mostly to benefit from this privileged access of ambassadors in such embassies, who have to put up with a stream of official visitors using their residences for accommodation, to become glorified hotel managers, laying out the fancy crockery and tedious frequency.⁸ The days of the professional diplomat as a concept were conceptualised, the grand plenipotentiary representing the political needs of his country in another state, are *not* already past.

10. Meanwhile, for the ordinary public, the self-serving *élite* of fake-omnipotence of the world's diplomats has created a *fake* illusion: that they are in control, allowing the rest of the world to live on with our lives. We are not entitled to this illusion. Responsibility must end. We must correspondingly take

responsibility for our own international affairs. Our votes, and our behaviour, have international consequences. Every action, whether buying fruit, employing a cleaner, or choosing where to take your holiday is international, and is, in its way, a form of diplomacy.

Everyone is a diplomat.

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For obvious reasons, commercial companies have been the first to adapt to this reality. Bosses of big banks and manufacturers now visit China far more often than do our politicians (and thus know much more about it). Multinationals have long ago transcended the bounds of national location and identity. Exxon Mobil has a large political department to monitor and negotiate with the many governments with whom the company has dealings. McDonalds and Google are effectively conducting their own diplomacy, such are the multiple effects (local, international, social, economic, aesthetic, environmental) of their decisions. It was notable that during his 2006 visit to the US, Chinese President Hu Jintao visited Microsoft in Seattle before — and for longer than — he visited the Capitol. Watching the visit, I was struck by how Bill Gates squired the President around in the same manner an ambassador would have of old. Shareholders and consumers should be aware of this in their choices.

Some commentators on this trend, notably Thomas Friedman, argue that this massive commercial interaction is bound to have positive effects, that the internet for instance can only promote openness and free speech. Reality suggests that commerce and technology can be as ambiguous in their effects as anything else. Google, Yahoo and Microsoft have all been accused by Amnesty International of abetting censorship and repression in China by supplying equipment and adapting their search engines to block certain sites and, in Yahoo's case, assisting the Chinese authorities in identifying

The World is Flat, London 2005

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ing on-line anti-government critics. In response, they have a that no company alone can change Chinese law, by which they abide. The solution is therefore obvious.¹⁰

These forces must be pointed in the right direction if they to be for the good. Effective foreign policy, whether in promoting labour rights or environmental standards, now requires coalitions — actors — the private sector, civil society and government — in concert to be effective. If foreign ministries are to be even relevant, in the future, as propagators of policy and they must consider how to organise such coalitions, and how encompass, direct and inform these many different strands of factors of policy.

The NGO Global Witness has been tracking how wars are by the exploitation of natural resources — timber, diamonds, unscrupulous governments and traders. Global Witness popularises the notion of "conflict diamonds", whose extraction (often in the form of dreadful cruelty) was controlled by warlords in West Africa's Charles Taylor being the most infamous example. Bought by international diamond trading companies and sold high street. The proceeds went to buy AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenades which were then used in the vicious and destructive wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone and elsewhere. Global Witness's work done much to highlight a connection that both stimulates and sustains conflict, and as a result, governments and, to a limited extent, the diamond trade itself are having to take action. There way still to go towards global rules and norms to inhibit such The fact that Global Witness is run on a shoestring (its raised their first funds by shaking collecting tins at underground

William James

tions) and funded by philanthropic foundations illustrates that its ideas are still outside the foreign policy mainstream.

The practice and process of diplomacy, then, needs to change into something much more diverse and eclectic such that we perhaps shouldn't give it a collective name — such as *diplomacy* — at all. ² *new (sic) diplomacy*

Beyond this transformation of diplomacy, there are other steps too, which involve a conscious abandonment of the state-centred thinking so intrinsic to the nature of international relations and diplomacy today. This touches on the substance, more than the process, of international relations. Here we must step into more idealist territory.

Cosmopolitanism dates from Greek society in the fourth century BC. A cosmopolitan is a citizen of the world — someone whose loyalties transcend a particular state or polity. As argued in more recent expositions, ¹² cosmopolitanism embodies the idea that we have obligations to other human beings outside our nation, and that we must take seriously the ways in which people in different cultures choose to live. We may not agree with them, but we have to deal with them.

In a world of massive interaction, it seems we have little choice. In our world today, how the Russian government treats the Chechens may affect our safety riding the subway in London or New York City. Working conditions in Pakistan affect employment in Europe. Carbon emissions in Australia may endanger biodiversity in Sussex or Utah, or cause sea levels to rise in Bangladesh. Less selfishly, our emotions are touched by the suffering in Darfur.

Meanwhile, many of the things that most worry us, and undermine both our sense of well-being and our actual safety, do not fit into the conventional measurement of classical economics or theories of international relations. Our concern for the suffering of others, for

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instance, is not easily quantified, ¹⁵ and nor is our instinct for na — a profound human characteristic that has no measure in economic theory but has been demonstrated in countless studies. There are things beyond measure, beyond calculation. No one calculating things in Bosnia in the 1990s would have considered their decision's effect on the anti-Muslims in Egypt (or Leeds), sometimes many years later.

In the morass and confusion of forces at work in the twenty-first century, we need guideposts to steer our path. The intuition and prejudices of less-connected eras are a help, but insufficient. As we are dazzled by its many colours and shapes, still need criteria by which to make decisions — to guide us.

In contrast to the *ethnocentrism* I advocate for the future of *diplomacy*, we badly need singular if not *universalist ideas* to treat one another and arbitrate our global existence: *norms*, if not *common rules*. Such *universalist* *ideas* naturally *emerge*. Many of our shared problems are classic "tragedies of the commons" where corrective action implies costs for the actor (such as carbon tax), and where "free riding" is rewarded. Invoking standards immediately draws an accusation of the very essence I have earlier attacked.

Since Russia's government bears no cost directly (in economic terms) for brutality in Chechnya (even if New York City may have a motive does it have to change policy? Put simply, the problem of devilling international policy is that those deciding it are very not those affected by it.

Here, Popper might guide us once more. The realist, in a realist-based model of national foreign policy-making encourages c

11. Conclusion: The End of "Diplomacy"?

- 1 GM is famously burdened by massive obligations — amounting to some \$85bn — to fund the pensions of its former and current workers.
- 2 At the inquiry into the death of British weapons scientist (and my former colleague), David Kelly, one of the Ministry of Defence witnesses, Brian Jones, said "I think 'weapons of mass destruction' has become a convenient catch-all which in my opinion can at times confuse discussion of the subject."
- 3 www.SecurityCouncilReport.org
- 4 I am aware that this proposal will strike some as unrealistic. Trotsky gave us the notion of a "transitional idea", a demand that you know to be unrealisable in the current circumstance, but in making it you may nevertheless change the current system for the better, and ultimately it may be shifted to where the demand can be realised.
- 5 Who included, for instance, David Kelly on whom I and the UK Mission to the UN relied on heavily for expert interpretation of the evidence on Iraq's biological weapons programme. For instance, I asked him many times to brief other Security Council delegations on Iraq's weapons programmes, along with other British experts on chemical weapons and ballistic missiles. Somewhat belying the British government's portrayal of him after the infamous *Today* programme No. 10 dossier leak, we regarded him at the UK mission as Britain's foremost and most authoritative expert.
- 6 In brief, these were that the embassy had neglected on-the-ground political reporting in its rush to sell British goods to the Shah. Sir Anthony Parsons, the ambassador, argued that embassies should always ensure that they had diplomats fluent in local languages who were tasked to go out and listen to ordinary people. He also warned against the tendency in reports back to the capital to emphasise

- 7 www.crisisgroup.org
- 8 My ambassador in Germany once wearily told me that six out of seven he was either entertaining officially or attending dinners.
- 9 *Amnesty International Report*, 20 July 2006
- 10 The Open Society Institute — not a government, note — is doing with universities to develop a Code of Conduct for IT nics operating in China.
- 11 The UN's Global Compact was a start at this challenge, but to be more widespread. The Global Compact was, by dint investigated it, not a mass activity.
- 12 Such as Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates' politanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers. New York: W. W. 2006.
- 13 An economist might argue that this concern is easily counted amounts individuals choose to give to charity, but this does into account reservations people may have — which may in giving — about the effectiveness of aid and other relevant Shirley Hazzard's, *People in Glass Houses*, London: Macmillan, reprinted 1996, shows that such problems are of depressi standing.
- 15 See his controversial speech "Power and Super-Power Leadership in the Twenty-First Century", delivered at the Foundation and Center for American Progress — See Peace Initiative, New York, 6 June 2006.
- 16 Perhaps another "transitional idea".

Robert D. ...

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