

DISCUSSION PAPERS IN DIPLOMACY

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Negotiating with the Internet***

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THE DEMOCRATISATION OF DIPLOMACY: NEGOTIATING WITH THE INTERNET¹

Richard Grant

The Internet, World Wide Web, telephones, digital imagery, and other information and communication technologies (ICTs) have changed the environment in which diplomacy has operated. Three factors have driven this transformation: speed of application; increasing capacity; and shrinking costs. Together, they have led to the global reach of the technologies; to rapidly increasing numbers of players; and to the rapidly changing nature of the play.² Creating new communities of interest is an easy, instantaneous process in virtual reality. We live in a knowledge economy, where the transmission of knowledge is one of the key factors in wealth creation and prosperity - and security.

In the developed world, we are moving into a new era where the enabling effects of communications media have been grasped by a broad swathe of the population. Parts of the developing world are also moving in the same direction. We are told that the revolution will continue. What has been disturbing to many is the pace with which we have moved so far. The telegraph, radio, telephone, and television all changed society, but they took their time. The Internet has moved from being a device of the research scientist to an everyday tool in a short space of years.

The Internet has its effects in foreign policy as it does in every other area of government policy. The technology now controls the way in which information flows around the globe. This has enabled the 'news', which is the base material of foreign policy and the way governments interact with each other, to become faster, more readily available, and able to reach almost every part of the world. The interactions of governments, which are the purpose of diplomacy, are being affected by these developments in significant ways. The prospect for even faster, and potentially more far-reaching, changes in the

1) This is an edited version of an earlier paper of the same title published by the Oxford Internet Institute (at <http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk>). The author and the Editors would like to thank Professor William Dutton, Director of the OII, for his permission to reproduce the article - in amended and updated form - here.

2) See for example W. H. Dutton, *Society on the Line: Information Politics in the Digital Age*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

future will require foreign ministries to be nimble and informed in their responses.

Governments are making the adjustment, and experiencing that the way they make policy in this environment is changing – at times very quickly. Electronic communication affects the way in which the public can be involved in policy debates in three main ways: the Internet provides a means of dissemination of information to a degree and reach that is new; the Internet enables more and more people to make their own judgements about events and issues, independent of the policy of governments; and as a consequence, the Internet can provide a vehicle for policy debate (i.e. communicating ideas with a view to influencing policy) to a degree which is also new.

It is within the frameworks created by the future development of these three characteristics that public policy will have to be made. In this study, we look at some of the consequences of the increased technological power that the Internet brings: the increasing influence of non-state players in the foreign policy area; the creation of new communities of interest; and the relevance of freedom of information laws. The main purpose is to see how the policy formulation environment has changed, and continues to change, for governments and those who advise them. In particular, how this affects the ability of government policy advisers to operate in the changed circumstances of a wired world.³ Foreign policy is the area of concentration, but, *pari passu*, the consequences extend across all areas of public policy. This is not just a foreign policy revolution.

There has been some reflection on these issues in North America, and in the United Kingdom, but the emphasis has been more on the consequences for public diplomacy – that is, how a government engages in the public domain with those it wants to influence – rather than on the formulation of policy.

This study concentrates on the aspect of the foreign policy formulation process where immediacy reigns: that part of a foreign ministry's work where the pressure of 'news' drives the response of governments. This is very much in the public eye at present, as events such as the war in Iraq show. The

3) It is also important to state what this study does not cover. It does not look at some areas of Internet usage and its effects, including the abuse of the technology for criminal purposes (international crime, and money-laundering, for instance), which have their foreign policy aspects, or for terrorist purposes ('cyber-terrorism'), which clearly affect international security and the diplomatic efforts that go to countering this. This is also not a study of e-government: the provision of government services through the Web.

demands on governments to respond to breaking news and real-time information flows are growing, as is the international theatre of interest.

Diplomacy, by its very nature, is an ongoing process which does not lend itself easily to short-termism. Of course, one can finalise a part of the process, but even that will create a follow-up process of its own.⁴ Today, event-led diplomacy is very much to the fore as hyperspace opens up.

Much of the work of foreign ministries around the world continues to be managed through the normal processes of diplomacy: instructions to embassies in foreign countries; meetings and negotiations which are not in the public focus; collecting, reporting, and disseminating relevant information; patient and slow building of constituencies of interest; and the resolution of many technical issues through intergovernmental procedures, such as international conferences, international and regional organisations, or technical working groups.

The new technologies will not usurp the rationale for diplomacy and for diplomats, but there is evidence that the flows of information are putting pressure on existing structures and procedures of information management. There will continue to be a need for intermediaries in the interaction of states, whether it be in a bilateral, regional, or multilateral framework. We should not confuse the message and the messengers. What is clear is that the way diplomacy is conducted is changing, and change implies adaptation. Foreign services across the world are all faced, to one degree or another, by the challenges of the changing environment. They are not alone – so are corporations and citizens.

It should not be inferred that foreign ministries have not taken up electronic technology – most have done so, in many cases for some time. The rule is for foreign ministries to conduct business electronically as well as in the traditional manner, including having a Website and using e-mail. Active use of technology has helped the international negotiating process.

For instance, a small example of this in the South Pacific involves the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Convention, which was concluded in 2000. In the preparatory phase before the establishment of the Commission to govern the accord (as foreseen in the Convention itself, and prior to its entry into force), a Preparatory Conference Secretariat was set up. It, in turn, started a Website that is used for the transmission of documents to and from

4) Detailed international negotiations on a new convention are a good example of a defined diplomatic process coming to an end. But the consequences of such negotiations are that there is a new international regime in place, which itself needs diplomatic monitoring and managing.

participants throughout the negotiations. It is in fact a 'virtual' secretariat.⁵ There are other examples of technology reaching into multinational negotiations, as communications systems are upgraded and the use of the Internet allows information to be exchanged and negotiations to proceed in the virtual reality of the Internet.

How digital technology has changed the practice of diplomacy

Foreign policy has throughout history been largely the guarded preserve of governments and their agents, established in foreign ministries. The pattern has not altered much over the last 80 years or so. The rise of previous technologies – the telegraph, the telephone, the telex, the fax machine – affected diplomatic practice in their day, but did not have the reach of today's and tomorrow's technology: light-weight, digital, and highly mobile.⁶

In order to provide both information and policy advice to their governments, foreign ministries have relied on the expertise of their staff, their network of diplomatic missions, the confidentiality of diplomatic communication, and their access to foreign decision-makers. Governments in turn have come to rely on their foreign ministries for both providing their national viewfinder for events in the world and for conducting foreign policy in a way that best advances the national interest.

That exclusivity of influence and decision-making has gradually been attenuated in the years since World War II by various factors: the increase in the number of independent states; globalisation; the growth of international bodies to which governments have entrusted the negotiation of some issues; the increasing importance in the international arena of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other non-governmental actors; and the effects of technology, of which the Internet/ICT revolution is the latest example. Equally, the growing complexity of the international agenda, both in subject

5) See <http://www.ocean-affairs.com>.

6) This is not the first time it has happened. Joanna Neuman reminded us that 'with nearly every new invention, diplomats complained that they no longer had time to make rational decisions, while journalists boasted of new-found power to influence public opinion. The closest mirror to the upheaval felt by diplomats amid the CNN curve is that seen more than a century earlier with the invention of the telegraph. There was a revolution.' J. Neuman, 'The Media's Impact on International Affairs, Then and Now', *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 16 (1), 1996, pp. 109-23. <http://www.ceip.org/infostudygroup/neuman.html>.

matter and in size, has meant for some time that foreign ministries are not the only departments of state involved in international negotiations and exchanges.

Today, even if foreign policy professionals regard themselves as leaders in the practice of diplomacy, they have to admit that they share that practice with a lot more players than they used to, including many more non-government players. Diplomacy has become democratized. The technology allows more people to play, many of them non-experts or interest groups with individual issues to pursue, as it increases the size of the playing field by an almost exponential amount, and it changes the rules every day.

There are undoubted tensions in the public policy environment as a result of the spread of ICTs. There are five principal aspects worth noting:

- Speed may complicate policy formulation.
- Open access to information provides greater quantities of information and reduces the expert's margin of advantage.
- Access to the technology is inherently cheap, and ubiquitous.
- Citizens expect greater access to policy formulation.
- Non-state actors play a more important role.

Rapidly-changing ICT capabilities and their consequences for diplomacy

Speed of electronic communication

Speed works both ways. It can bring the outline of an immediate event, but it cannot bring instant comprehension. Speed can be an asset to enable decisions to be taken on the basis of immediacy of information availability. An earthquake in Peru; flooding in Bangladesh; the terrorist events in the USA of 9/11 in 2001 – all such news is now conveyed to foreign governments at lightning speed. Some countries will have to react to these events, some will not. Some may not react to news of the event itself, but may have to respond to questions from its own citizens or NGOs, who have themselves been alerted to the news by the same media as their governments, and who have their own reasons for getting a reaction from their national government.⁷

7) A straightforward example is the provision of consular services to one's nationals. This is becoming an increasing demand on resources of many foreign ministries.

Knowing quickly about events may be an advantage to the national interest in many cases. It enables governments to think about the consequences of events in different parts of the world, and how they impinge on their own country. They may not have to alter their own policy as a consequence, but they are reassured that they have learnt quickly about a development, and considered their reaction.

To the foreign policy adviser, speed is not always a blessing. Few events in international affairs are simple. Understanding is not easy. The consequences for one's own country, let alone for others, may not be self-evident at first. The practice of diplomacy generally teaches caution and prudence, not bullet points of advice. Consultation with other friendly governments to ascertain their judgements of events is commonplace before deciding on a response to events far away.

Even what seems like a straightforward case for a quick reaction might not get one. The genocides in Rwanda and the conflicts in the Balkans in recent years were both known to the world quickly, some of it in real time, but that did not help individual governments, or international organisations, to react with corresponding speed. In both cases, the knowledge of the events – rapid and world-wide – was met with an uneasy political reaction across the developed world, which combined to make the policy reaction slow and cumbersome.

According to Richard Solomon, President of the United States Institute of Peace and a former US foreign service officer:

Information about breaking international crises that once took hours or days for government officials and media to disseminate is now being relayed real-time to the world not only via radio and television, but over the Internet as well. Ironically though, for policy-makers, instant dissemination of information about events both far and near is proving to be as much a bane as a bounty.⁸

In itself, the immediacy issue opens considerations for all organisations that intermediate our knowledge of the world. Today, some of the professional media organisations are losing their long-established primacy in providing the information. Real-time communication is testing their traditional procedures and performance. The technology has changed that forever.

8) R. H. Solomon, 'The Internet and the Diffusion of Diplomacy', *US Foreign Policy Agenda*, March 2000, <http://www.usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps>.

Once a piece of information is known, there will be a groundswell of interest in a government's response. Delay in commenting may be seen as prevarication, or imply that a government is lacking in policy or facts. Credibility may be impaired. The immediacy and the flexibility of the technologies allow others to enter the commentary/policy space, whether or not the government or the foreign ministry is in it. It is also easier to find commentators, and whether they be experts in the field, people with an interest, or spectators, they can soon become players.

A reaction will be sought: probably by the media in the first instance, but not always. Governments, and ministers, will feel that a response is required.⁹ Advice will be offered, but not offered exclusively by government advisers. Rather, there will be a proliferation of advice from different quarters, and governmental systems will swing around a bit as they try to decide a line of policy reaction. This has become the standard of political systems around the globe. The professional diplomats are adjusting to new practices.

Foreign policy advisers, who have been used to being more reticent in the conduct of their business, are being forced more and more into the public domain. This not only requires the skill to present information in a concise and accurate manner. It also increases the amount of scrutiny to which the diplomat is subject. That scrutiny comes now from more quarters: the media; the public; the non-government organisation; and, of course, from other governments and societies as well.

Political scientist Eytan Gilboa has defined the situation this way:

... the foreign affairs bureaucracy is facing another dilemma ... If foreign policy experts, intelligence officers, and diplomats make a quick analysis based on incomplete information and severe time pressure, they might make bad policy recommendations. Conversely, if they take the necessary time to verify and integrate information and ideas from a variety of sources, and produce in-depth reliable reports and recommendations, they may find that their efforts have been futile if policy makers have had to make immediate decisions in response to challenges and pressure emanating from coverage and global television.¹⁰

9) According to Evan Potter, 'The current means of issue management are destabilising, as journalists and the public expect governments to state positions and decisions almost as soon as issues arise.' E. H. Potter (ed.), *Cyber-diplomacy: Managing Foreign Policy in the Twenty First Century*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2002) p. 7.

10) Eytan Gilboa, in Potter (ed.) *Cyber-diplomacy*, 92–93.

The debate can widen very quickly in the era of the Web. In some cases, an event or an issue will create not only reactions and advice from interested people and organisations, but also digital information flows through Websites and electronic communities with their own logic and output, from the well focussed to something spontaneous and short-lived. Distance, time, and cost are no longer obstacles to information transmission.

Opening access to a fast-growing number of participants

As the technology develops, it leads to the creation and availability electronically of much greater amounts of information in ever shorter periods of time.¹¹ This can be seen most simply in the explosion of the number of sites and networked people and institutions around the globe. The estimate of 945 million people online in April 2004 is substantial.¹² In terms of growth of usage, another, possibly more revealing, comparison is the growth in the number of Internet hosts from 12 million in January 1996, to 93 million in January 2000, and then to 233 million in January 2004.¹³

The growing amount of time people spend on the net, the increase in household access in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, and the falling costs of both hardware and software indicate the increasing volume of material on the Web. As an indication of the scale of this resource, the Google Web searcher estimates there were 1,326,920,000 Web pages available in April 2004.¹⁴

ICT-enabled digital transmission does not involve just the Web and e-mail. Today, mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), interactive television, and other devices provide pathways for information to reach individuals around the world. Their use is constantly expanding. New technologies are just around the corner, and bringing diverse digital technologies together is creating new capabilities all the time, particularly as

11) Just to give one example, between 1990 and 2000, the capacity of a single fibre-optic cable grew from 1 billion bits per second to 1 trillion. L. A. Karoly and C. W. A.

Paris, *The 21st Century at Work: Forces Shaping the Future Workforce and Workplace in the United States*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2004 at http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2004/RAND_MG164.pdf.

12) See <http://www.clickz.com/stats>. Unfortunately we do not have a worldwide base figure for, say, 1996, against which to compare current figures.

13) See <http://www.isc.org>.

14) E-mail of 16 April 2004 from <http://kmsself@ix.netcom.com>, found through a Google search.

the cost continues to drop. As Pat Gelsinger, Chief Technology Officer of microelectronics manufacturer Intel, has said: 'Soon every communication device will contain compute functionality. And every computing device will communicate.'¹⁵

Against this volume of material, the trained observer is at a disadvantage. He/she cannot have the time to trawl through it all. The accuracy of the material is not always clear – and the diplomat is more likely to trust reliable sources known to him/her already. The amount of time to verify the accuracy of material is also foreshortened, as the dissemination of information piles up. The diplomat will want to rely on informed advice from colleagues in embassies around the world, who will themselves be discovering the information on their screens. The media too will not always be sure that the material is accurate, and will be checking – so the expert's reliance on the reliability of the reputable media will adjust accordingly.

In short, the authority with which experts have spoken in the past is being reduced, because the time for application of his/her expertise – the intellectual judgements we make – is constantly challenged. The discipline of applying that judgement on foreign affairs is under pressure. In more technical terms, the asymmetrical relationships between those who had information and those who did not have been changed to the benefit of the non-professional. Dealing with this aspect of modern diplomacy is a challenge for every foreign service. For instance, a Website based in Malaysia that carries video of the beheading of a hostage in Iraq, competes with an official press statement from any government source.

Openness brings with it the crucial questions of reliability and accuracy. Plenty of information, arriving very quickly, does not itself guarantee authenticity. This issue affects news media organisations as much as government bureaucracies. Both face the same challenge to uphold their credibility. A foreign ministry tends to rely for the accuracy of its information on the skill of its members, who in turn are used to judge the veracity of the information they manage. That takes time to establish – and in some societies it may not be possible to establish it – but time is something which has been radically foreshortened in today's world. So, judgement of the relevance and the accuracy of what we see and what we hear is a quality that diplomacy needs even more today than in the past.

15) P. Gelsinger, *Expanding Moore's Law with Convergence*, (Santa Clara, CA: Intel, January 2003), at <http://www.intel.com/labs/features/eml01031.htm>.

The inherently low cost of access to the technology

The costs involved in using the new technologies are dropping fast – not just of the hardware, but also the software, the network, and the costs to the user. This is true not only in the use of computers, but also with other platforms, such as the cell phone and other PDAs.¹⁶ Internet telephony, through the development of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology, will put even greater downward pressure on prices.

An OECD Communications Report shows that this pattern is mirrored across OECD member countries. The more sophisticated user can participate in the electronic communication game for a very low outlay of capital. These days a mobile phone, especially one fitted with a digital camera, allows anyone to be part of the networked community. The price of hand-held digital cameras has dropped significantly in the last few years: they now outsell traditional film cameras globally.

Hand in hand with ease of access comes the erosion of spatial barriers. Geographic boundaries are much less relevant in the information age. A person sitting in Wichita, Kansas or Shanghai, China is only a click away from the Website of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Wellington. If either wants to comment on New Zealand foreign policy, that is just another click or two. This effect means that potentially a much wider audience is available to share information with, or to observe what is going on. As we shall see later, it also increases the communities of interest beyond national boundaries.

Greater access for citizens

As the technology develops, so too does the audience, and so too the content. As the content develops, so the expectations of the audience change. In particular, people are getting accustomed to greater availability of information, and they expect to receive it as of right, preferably wherever they are, and at almost zero cost. This is not just an Internet phenomenon. All the platforms available today are capable of producing greater flows in information to many recipients. For example, aol.com reported in June 2004 that over 2 billion instant messages flowed across their networks every day.¹⁷

16) The OECD reports that 'Internet access prices have decreased considerably over recent years'. Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Communications Outlook 2003*, p. 154, at <http://www.oecd.org>.

17) Personal communication from Holly Hawkins, aol.com.

There are, of course, layers of interest in the material that is being transmitted around the globe. Not every one is interested in ‘the news’, which, as indicated earlier, is the main driver of foreign policy discussion and debate. But the greater the access to the information, the more will be the expectations of people about what they can access.

The centre of government, in the space occupied by ministers and policy advisers, constitutes a very small core of the information world. It is this core which is being challenged the most by the pressure of the information flows because the outer circles of the information world – the ‘men-in-the-street’ so to speak – are expecting greater exposure to what the government thinks and does about the information.¹⁸

This relationship is sharpened if those in the outer circles have decided either to take a more active interest in what is going on or, as we shall examine in the next section, have decided to become actors in the process. If the new actor is able to produce material of his/her own, and to toss it into the centre of the policy debate, his/her involvement has changed from observer to player.

The number of people with a sustained, ongoing interest in foreign policy is generally small in most western societies. It is not easy to quantify the numbers, but one way to do so is to look at how many people listen to radio stations or view television channels that carry international news. In the United Kingdom, for instance, in 2002/3 BBC Radio 4 had 11.8 per cent of radio audience share (compared with 36.6 per cent for local commercial radio) and BBC One television’s News reached about 5.1 million people, which is less than 10 per cent of the population.¹⁹

Similar figures apply in the USA where, with a much wider range of television stations to choose from, industry figures suggest that about 30 million Americans watch news on TV regularly, against a total population of the US of around 290 million. The trend is downwards. Cable news programs are watched by a significantly smaller number of viewers.²⁰

18) In one case, Estonia, the government has opened up its Cabinet process electronically to its citizens, including the right to comment directly on policy recommendations. The whole process is conducted electronically (see *Estonia Today, Information Society*, fact sheet of the Estonian Foreign Ministry, at <http://www.vm.ee>).

19) According to the BBC Annual Report 2002–03, BBC World – the global news channel – has increased its audience dramatically: its international audience grew from 75.2 million homes in 2002 to 227.7 million in 2003.

20) See <http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org>.

Even if the numbers watching news on television constitute a minority of citizens, three observations need to be made. The first is that people who watch the news are more likely to voice their opinions about it. In other words, to the extent that viewers are likely to write about developments to a newspaper or to their Member of Parliament (MP) or other representative – which is the traditional way of expressing views – it is amongst this audience that this would occur.

Secondly, within the circle of those who do listen to the radio news or watch the TV bulletin are those who are most likely to be involved in the discussion of policy issues: the elected, the civil service, the media, and those with a direct interest in the events reported. Between them, they have a magnifying effect on the evaluation of events and the development of policy.

The third observation is that the same people are most likely to be active in the new technology. For instance, statistics reveal that more and more British households are taking up access to the Internet: British National Statistics for February 2004 showed that 49 per cent of households in the UK access the Internet from home.²¹ The same survey revealed that about 58 per cent of adults had used the Internet in the three previous months. The Oxford Internet Institute's Oxford Internet Surveys (OxIS) confirm this.²² Statistically, therefore, the number of people who are accessing the Internet is growing fast and in ever increasing numbers. The potential for these people to be catching news on the Internet is high, even if we cannot measure it.²³

We know too that the number of people using other forms of technology than the computer to access the Web is growing fast. In the British National Statistics survey just mentioned, about 10 per cent had used a mobile phone for this purpose. This method will surely increase as the technology spreads – and it will obviously speed up reactions, since the observer will have the possibility of phoning another party about what he/she has just downloaded. We have to expect that the number of people who will get their 'news' from hand-held devices will grow as new generations of cell phones become more widely distributed and used.

21) See <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>.

22) See <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~oxis/enough.htm>.

23) According to the United Kingdom's National Statistics Online in February 2004, for instance, the use of the Internet in the UK was overwhelmingly for e-mail, while nearly half of adults had purchased goods or services over the net (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>).

How ICTs change relationships between key governance and diplomacy players

The concepts described in the previous section play out in the government process. A number of relationships between the government and other parts of society are affected by the way information of interest to foreign ministries is managed, analysed, and broadcast. New networks are being created all the time, joining people and organisations in an interactive process.

It is perhaps easiest to see these relationships and networks as a series of ripples around a central core, which is government decision-making. The relationships, as discussed in the following subsections, can be categorised as follows:

citizens and the media;

citizens and the Government;

the Government and the media;

the Government and non-state actors;

the civil service adviser and the minister; and

the Government-to-Government relationship (i.e. the formal channels of intergovernmental diplomacy).

Citizens and the media

As examined earlier in this paper, today's technology is offering many more ways for the public to be informed – and to inform. 'News' is becoming much more of a two-way street, as citizens find out how they can use the technology to project their views into the 'hyperspace' of the Internet and Web. The introduction of new types of technology will increase that variety, and the media will be under pressure as this happens. Questions of perception, transparency, and credibility will arise with this increasing flow of information. The citizen is faced with making judgements more frequently on the credibility of the sources of information available.

Credibility is essential to trust, both in the citizen's relations to the media and to the government. This is something established over time. When information is virtually instantaneous, reflection and judgement about the accuracy of information are put under acute pressure.

An example of this is the controversy in the United Kingdom in early 2004 over photos published in *The Daily Mirror* that originally claimed to show acts of violence by British troops on captive Iraqis who were being held in confinement in Iraq. An investigation by the British Army revealed the photographs to be supposed reconstructions of purported events, not

photographs of actual events.²⁴ For public opinion, the dissemination of these photos called into question the standards of behaviour of British military personnel, the responsibility for such acts, and, more broadly, the nature of the political judgements of the British Government over involvement in Iraq. This could be seen from the growing involvement of the Army and ministers and civil servants in having to respond to public interest.

As the controversy over the validity of the photos was carried by other media, the consequences of the event were relayed widely around the world. So it was not just UK citizens who had to make judgements on reliability and credibility, but all those who were aware of the issue. The eventual revelation that the photos were falsified did not invalidate the need for a government reaction when the photos were first published. The government felt that it had to do this at the time, against a confused background in which the veracity of the information was slow to emerge.

What makes this case relevant to this study is that the reaction required of the UK Government to the furore created by the publication of the photos extended far beyond dealing with a dispute over whether British soldiers had, or had not, acted brutally. Because of the international interest in events in Iraq, the UK Government response was addressing an international audience of some complexity – Iraqis themselves, other Muslim states, other states with an interest in Iraq, and, naturally, public opinion in many countries.

In future, the ‘reliability’ factor is going to be more present in the consumers’ mind as he/she deals with increased flows of information. It will not just be the ‘big’ events (war, famine, riots, for instance) that are affected. There will be competing versions of even less significant events, because there will be many reports on them in all sorts of media – text messages, digital photos, e-mails, etc. This will put pressure on media organisations seeking to establish a reputation for accuracy and veracity to be themselves discerning, not just in what they disseminate but also in judging the accuracy of the material they receive or gather. One might say that this has always been the case for reputable media. Today, however, the pressures are greater, and tomorrow will be greater still. It is the same for a foreign ministry.

News organisations now generally operate a 24-hour, seven-day service, in which Websites are part and parcel of their product, even when the material originates in radio, television, or print. Staying afloat in such a competitive environment will depend very much on the media organisation’s

24) The photos were revealed to be faked on 14 May 2004: see, inter alia, *The Daily Mirror* of that date.

ability to meet the consumers' demands. Price, accessibility, and attractiveness of presentation will be important. Authenticity, reliability, veracity, may be more so.

Citizens and the government

The traditional ways in democracies for political leaders to respond to expressions of interest or concern from citizens are well established: parliamentary processes including parliamentary questions; public speeches; written correspondence; interviews with the media; press statements; public meetings, including constituency meetings; and private meetings with voters and citizens.

Today, politicians are also adapting new technologies to communicate. These uses range from e-mail at the basic level, to Websites and some interactive activities.²⁵ Only in limited cases is this an applied dialogue about policy formulation: issues of policy may well arise in these exchanges, but ministers do not make changes to government policy in such informal exchanges.

As governments become more skilled in presenting online services to their citizens, one can expect these services to grow substantially. For instance, the German Bundestag – the lower house of the German Parliament – has established an online forum for policy discussion on matters before it.²⁶ The White House in Washington DC (at <http://www.whitehouse.gov>) and European Commission (at <http://www.europa.eu.int>) have launched virtual 'chat rooms' on the Web. This engagement with citizens raises a question about the provision of online systems to households and citizens, and the 'digital divide' between those who are empowered, and those who are not. A further debate concerns the rules around *who* can participate, since the Web allows access from anywhere. Some form of control may need to be inserted so that, as the use of the systems gets more sophisticated, the initiators of dialogue are aware that the respondents have a genuine and legitimate interest in the subject.

It is in the commercial world where the technology is the best developed, establishing markets of willing sellers and willing buyers. Governments can learn from this experience in dealing with their own citizens. The ways in

25) The use of mobile telephones is now so widespread as not to be regarded as use of a new technology.

26) See <http://www.bundestag.de/dialog>. The experimental programme was moderated by Bundestag staff, but with a 48-hour delay in posting opinions from the public.

which commercial companies have developed systems of targeted marketing, for example, could provide a model to governments who want to target parts of the electorate or, in a foreign policy debate, to target people and institutions outside national boundaries.

This brings us to the question of the rules under which the Internet will operate in modern democratic societies. Governance is put under increasing public pressure: not just because of the complex technology and the difficulty in assigning a domicile to participants, but also because of debates over freedom of speech. Transaction costs in controlling access or in developing methods of 'legitimation' of participants are likely to be high, but with a relatively low likelihood of agreement over these criteria in the end. Privacy provisions also apply, and create limits around the identification of individual participants.

A related issue which is outside the framework of this study concerns e-democracy: the use of the technology to improve information flows between governed and governing. In particular, governments have concentrated on the delivery of services to citizens through electronic means. Governments are moving cautiously towards the use of electronic technology in various forms to conduct polling and voting processes, although online voting systems seem to be difficult to implement in a satisfactory way. In the United States, for instance, there seem to be deep concerns about the security of online voting, even though the technology is apparently available.²⁷ Voting by telephone is another possibility, if the security worries can be overcome.

Government and the media

There is a long-standing symbiosis between the media and governments. As the media depend on information transmission for their business and their profitability, they are more likely to be able to pay to deploy the technologies on which their business depends. This will give them an advantage in their reach and their presentation.

But, as we have seen earlier, mainstream media organisations are also under pressure in dealing with new communications systems. Foreign ministries are not the only players asking themselves question about the technology, its use, and how to get on to the playing field. As the Internet's democratising effect spreads, Hamilton and Jenner, in an article in *Foreign*

27) *New York Times*, 'The 2004 Campaign: Voting; Online Ballots Cancelled', *New York Times*, 6 February 2004, at <http://www.nytimes.com>.

Affairs, identify some similar concerns for the media to those that this study identifies for the diplomat: the opening of reporting not just to many more journalists, but the arrival of 'do-it-yourself journalism'; and risk of 'error, rumour, and disinformation' being the stuff of these impromptu media flows.²⁸

The pressures relate, on the one hand, to the accuracy and reliability of the information they are channelling, and, on the other hand, to the amount of competition they are facing. We know of the experience of the main US TV companies when the liberalisation of TV licences in the US created many competitors. We have to assume that similar competitive pressures created today will change the landscape of media, print, radio, television, and Internet. More and more, citizens receive news from many sources, not just the mainstream news programmes.

Now, a government has a more direct pathway to its citizens if it can develop suitable products to do so through the Web and e-mail. This puts them in some form of competition with the media. However, the government side is not yet there, in that there is not a direct link that enables a government to 'narrowcast' information and services to the individual citizen (although a lot of thought is going into this possibility).

Commercially, however, there are services available to willing clients to 'customise' the news they want to receive. Currently, this is more of a threat to the media companies than to the government, but one can see that governments will have to weigh up whether they try to individualise services for citizens themselves, or allow that selection to be part of a commercial transaction provided by non-government entities. As the information flows get bigger, it is conceivable that individual citizens will be prepared to 'contract out' the provision of government information and government services to private sector companies, which will intermediate.

A further aspect of this issue is the possibility of convergence between media and government. In Estonia, for instance, the main newspapers are available online; the reader is able electronically to comment on stories, and the Web log of these comments is available for people to read. At the same time, the Government's own e-government system allows citizens to see what is happening in developments in government policy, and to comment electronically on them. In some ways, there is a parallel process going on over two different networks. What if the two were brought together in some way,

28) J. M. Hamilton and E. Jenner, 'The New Foreign Correspondence', *Foreign Affairs*, 82 (5), 2003, pp. 131–8.

so that the comments to government and the comments to media were shared electronically? As a type of polling of public opinion, one can see the advantages to the government; and in terms of providing a means of diffusion of democratic debate, it could enhance the pull of the media.²⁹

Government and non-state actors

The wider the use of new communications media, the greater the potential number of people who follow international affairs. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the new communications technologies have allowed non-state actors to become more significant players in the foreign policy arena. Such non-state actors comprise a swathe of society, from the organised body with international chapters and connectivity down to the individual. Groups tend to be organised: individuals, by their nature, are not. Both ends of the spectrum can now be involved in policy, if they so wish.

NGOs have traditionally been active in democratic societies. The guilds of the City of London go back 800 years or so. The organisation of trade unions in England in the 1830s is another example. Professional bodies, like medical associations and bar organisations, have always seen a role for themselves in defending and promoting their interests with governments.

The period since World War II has seen many more NGOs establish themselves, growing substantially from about 6,000 in 1990 to 26,000 in 2000.³⁰ More recently, in the wake of the changing technologies, a number of these organisations have been able to organise on a global scale.³¹ The force of their participation has already changed the way in which diplomacy works. They are accredited to international organisations like the United Nations; and they are regarded by many governments as legitimate partners, for their expertise and their interest. Their advocacy is often a force for change. They have, in many cases, gained support from a wide range of individual voters in the societies in which they are active.

The experience of the last few years, particularly in OECD countries, is that NGOs have been strong advocates of their role in policy formulation, in

29) See the *I Decide Today* portal of the Estonian government (<http://www.tom.rik.ee>) and an example of an Estonian online newspaper (<http://www.postimees.ee>).

30) J. S. Nye, *Soft Power – The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

31) For example, Greenpeace claims an international membership of over 2.8 million people: well beyond the populations of about one third of the member states members of the United Nations.

asserting their right to participate in debates on policy, and to affect directly the choices of governments. This has led to some resistance from others, and indeed from within governments themselves, which claim that elected representatives are the outcome of the democratic process and that NGOs represent only their own members in relation to the specific issues for which the NGO was formed. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the right of NGOs, citizens, and interest groups to be involved in policy discussion is well established in all OECD societies. NGOs have also become – or, at least, the more established amongst them – more formalised organisations with a bureaucracy and a management style. They too have the same problem sorting through the information pool to find the material that informs their cause or causes.

NGOs have embraced the new technologies, and use them effectively to help their causes. Some NGO Websites have become influential forums for policy debate and sources of recommendations for policy change. Organisations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, OXFAM, Friends of the Earth, and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) are well-established players operating in numerous countries and playing a significant part in international negotiations. The prestigious NGOs are well known to governments and the public at large. In addition, there are many more who are less well known but who are active as advocacy bodies, ranging from the small-scale local or regional voluntary body through to those which deal with specific interests.³² These electronic communities, big or small, are living organisms, creating new networks every day.

Today, through use of digital technology, these bodies can organise themselves more cohesively than has been seen in the past.³³ They can do so locally; they can do so nationally; and they can do so internationally. In the field of international relations, there are relevant and recent examples, such as the anti-globalisation movement. Examples of the way this activity has affected the workings of international negotiations include the arranging of

32) An example of the latter might be <http://www.members.aol.com/MoistTowl/index.htm>, which is a site for collectors of moist towelettes.

33) The Canadian Security Intelligence Service commented: ‘The Internet will continue to play a large role in the success or failure of globalization protests and demonstrations. Groups will use the Internet to identify and publicise targets, solicit and encourage support, organise and communicate information and instructions, recruit, raise funds, and as means of promoting their various individual and collective aims.’ Canadian Security Intelligence Service, *Anti-globalization: A Spreading Phenomenon*, Report 2000/08 (2000), at <http://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca>.

demonstrations against the group of eight (G8) major countries in Gleneagles in summer 2005; against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Conference in Seattle in 1999; and, going back a little further, the successful opposition to the Multilateral Investment Agreement being negotiated in the OECD in 1996–98. Hand in hand with this increased operational ability of NGOs, there has been an increased standing in the capacity of these organisations as an actor on the international stage.

Governments react in formalised ways, in contrast to the informal protocols of the Internet. These formal protocols – the traditional exchanges by correspondence or through meetings, public and private – are less of a consideration to a motivated organisation or individual who wants to say something about events or crises. Speed may help their case, unlike in the case of the government. Certainly, exposure through the Internet to a wider range of interested people will strengthen their credentials. The ICBL, which was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for its work, is a striking example of an organisation which used communications technology to both organise support *and* build its international credibility.

Together with the increase in the number of players, there is a growing recognition that issues are more dependent on multilateral solutions than they have been in the past. These issues typically transcend national boundaries in ways that are not so easy to grasp, nor amenable to national solutions. Matters like transnational crime, people smuggling, drug-trafficking, money laundering, and even cyber-terrorism, have to be dealt with multinationally in today's world. Governments have recognised this, and are keen to encourage cross-border, even global, responses to deal with them. As a result, some issues are the subject of negotiation in recognised international and/or regional organisations. Others are handled in informal or formal intergovernmental networks between specialised agencies. In all of these matters, there is a growing community of non-state actors who see a role for themselves in the ongoing search for solutions. It is understandable that NGOs have led this public response.

These two tendencies increase the reach of the NGO. Not only does their community of interest lie across national boundaries but, because the growing number of issues is also distinctly international in their treatment, the reach of their community grows. Accordingly, non-state actors have assumed a greater role in the policy-making process through their ability to raise public awareness around issues, their ability to represent to governments that public awareness, and by skilful use of new communications media to publicise issues, obtain funding, and connect their members.

What we are also seeing is the ability of non-state actors to form wider communities of interest than just in the field in which they specialise. From being single issue bodies in their founding days, they are now covering more territory than they once did. Their role is growing in terms of what they can do for their members, or even those they deal with primarily through their Websites. This is a result of the creation of new sources of information that contest the space where governments once had a compelling advantage. The growing international dimension of the work of NGOs, in their reach, in the number of issues they cover, and in the networks they build, is something to which foreign ministries are adjusting.

An example is Greenpeace, the international environmental protection organisation which runs 47 Websites around the world, in addition to its international site.³⁴ Another is the ICBL, which has hyperlinks on its Websites to news sources that disseminate news originating from ICBL, as well as on '*other subjects*' (emphasis added).

The ICBL site also has a hyperlink to the Reuters Foundation site, which is an excellent example of the use of the technology to create new communities of interest in hyperspace. The Foundation runs AlertNet (<http://www.alertnet.org>), which 'provides global news, communications and logistics services to the international disaster relief community and the public.' Although open to the public, AlertNet can be used more intensively by NGOs in their work on disaster relief, through a password-based site that tracks individual disasters, monitors international responses, and communicates with each other in a coordinated manner. The Reuters Foundation says its aim, in running this service, is putting 'Reuters (sic) core skills of accuracy, speed and freedom from bias at the service of the humanitarian community' (<http://www.alertnet.org>).

NGOs use their Websites to create direct links to lobbying governments. The Friends of the Earth (FoE) Website (<http://www.foe.co.uk>), for instance, has a section entitled 'Press for Change', where suggestions to the viewer include actions such as 'Email the US ambassador' (e.g. about the WTO dispute with the EU on genetically-modified foods), 'contact your MP about GATS', and similar advice with regard to the United Kingdom Department of Trade and Industry, and Members of the European Parliament. The entire section is introduced with the text 'When an MP receives a hundred letters,

34) The organisation is described at <http://www.greenpeace.org> in the following way: 'Greenpeace focuses on the most crucial worldwide threats to our planet's biodiversity and environment.'

they (sic) take notice. When a company director gets a thousand emails direct to their (sic) inbox, it makes things happen.³⁵ This may well be right, in the sense that a flow of incoming letters or e-mails may alert governments to an issue of public concern. This does show the power to mobilise. At the same time, it raises questions about the degree to which all those correspondents are well informed on the issue.

Take an example in the United States. An NGO like Global Policy Forum (<http://www.globalpolicy.org>) says that it ‘monitors policy making at the United Nations, promotes accountability of global decisions, educates and mobilises for global citizen participation, and advocates on vital issues of international peace and justice.’ It has links to a range of other NGOs on its Website, saying that such organisations are ‘increasingly active in policy making at the United Nations’. The description of the Global Policy Forum shows that it tries to be active, not so much in the national context – i.e. *vis-à-vis* the United States Government – but in the way it tries to influence the United Nations itself and UN member governments.

A well-organised and relatively well-resourced NGO is a strong player. The ability to use electronic links to communicate with so many different people in different places cheaply, quickly, and with relatively little effort, is central to their reach. The Website is a central focus for people with an interest in that organisation’s particular field, but the technology allows newly-made contacts to be kept on the database and exploited in the future. This use of what has been a commercial technique refined over several decades shows how quickly the technology can transform an organisation from being an interest group into a player.

Quickly, however, the range of non-governmental players has spread beyond the traditional NGO. NGOs are not the only non-state actors empowered by the Internet and related technologies. They have been joined by an ever-growing proliferation of participants including newsgroups; personal diaries kept as a blog; peer-to-peer networks; and motivated individuals. To the extent that these citizens want to express views on foreign policy, they now have far more chances of becoming involved.

The technology also enables new communities of interest to be created easily and quickly. Because the Web and e-mail, mobile phones and texts are ubiquitous, they allow for communications between groups and between

35) The group’s Website also has hyperlinks to several hundred other organisations whose activities might be of interest to those who reach the FoE site (see <http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns>).

individuals. Because the technology is interactive, people are able to do more than simply get a message out. They can refine their message, discuss it, pass it on, and identify new users much more comprehensively than used to be the case. The non-state actor is becoming more of a player, and a more powerful player at that. The networks which can be created become chains of interest and influence that can multiply rapidly.

This study is not the place for an exhaustive cataloguing of the pool of non-state actors. It is large, and it is growing fast. Much depends on motivation. Easier access to information does not necessarily convert into activism. There are plenty of examples, nonetheless, of individuals becoming players in international affairs in recent times, through their use of technology: the blogs run by individual US soldiers advancing on Baghdad; the digital photo posted on a public Website; the e-mail protest chains. Their power resides in the fact that they do not need intermediaries to broadcast the message, so they are able to make a choice about participation or non-participation. Their weakness is that, unsure of their motives and credibility, the man-in-the-street may be misled and misinformed.

This environment redefines the hierarchical nature of traditional foreign policy making. The institutions which we are used to dealing with are not necessarily being replaced by new players, but they are sharing the policy space with the newcomers. It is more difficult for those within the traditional diplomatic networks to work with those who lie outside them. Again, this is an area where the foreign policy adviser is having to adapt.

The civil service adviser and the Minister

All the relationships examined so far eventually bear in on the advice that an adviser gives to the political principal. In addition to identifying reliable information from the flood of material that surrounds us, the adviser has to be able to use the new communications media to advantage. Whether it be for collection of information, conducting a policy debate, or spreading an electronic message, the adviser will need to comprehend more quickly the trend of events and to devise policy advice to meet them. Of course, ministers will not rely only on what they hear from their advisers. The technology enables them to interact more directly not just with their own voters, but with sources of information and opinion around the globe.

Staying relevant is an increasingly core challenge for the adviser. This means an adjustment in knowledge, and an adjustment in techniques. Constant monitoring of breaking news is already something that all foreign ministries are doing. Monitoring of public attitudes to foreign policy issues, in

a more specific way, is not so far advanced. The Internet can provide the opportunity for that to happen in a more direct way.

In Estonia, the government's portal allows citizens to follow the development of policy, and to comment on these developments. This process is used particularly with the making of legislation and regulations, but it can also be used to track public opinion on issues. Changes to proposed policy amendments and decisions can be made electronically by citizens. These are received in the Prime Minister's Department. If there is sufficient support for changes, then the Prime Minister's Department can ask for the department responsible for the legislation or regulation to consider adjusting the policy proposal. About 5 per cent of ideas received from the public have been considered relevant enough to initiate changes in the draft policy.

The Estonian Foreign Ministry has, however, had less call than other Estonian government departments to adjust policy since this e-system has been introduced. The reasons for this might include: the small amount of regulation and legislation that the Foreign Ministry controls; the complicated nature of that which it does; and the lower level of interest by citizens in foreign policy rather than in regulation that touches directly on their daily lives.

On the other hand, as a channel for more direct feedback to a government ministry of the views of citizens and interested parties, the Estonian example shows what can be done to bring citizens and advisers into closer proximity. The tendency is, therefore, to bring a more immediate link between the two, in ways that had not been traditional. So, it is not just contact between Minister and interest group that is more direct: the civil servant, too, can expect to be asked to be more present.

Government-to-government relationships

Governments already manage part of their relations with other governments electronically, for example in conducting international negotiations. Where we see new challenges for governments, against the background of the global babble, is in the competition to make themselves listened to ahead of other governments. The spread of influence, the presentation of values, the attraction of partnerships in this work will be an increasing part of international diplomacy.³⁶ The fight to be heard and to influence will become

36) American academic and civil servant, Joseph S. Nye has defined this as 'soft power'. See Nye, *Soft Power*.

more central to a government's view of what its foreign ministry should do. The attention given to public diplomacy by many foreign ministries shows this to be the case.

What diplomacy has seen in recent times has been an increasing tendency to elevate government-to-government communication to a level involving the direct intervention of ministers and senior government figures. Easy travel, the growth of intergovernmental meetings, and the ability of ministers to talk directly to their counterparts had already changed the role of embassies in foreign capitals. They do not have exclusivity in presenting the views of the sending state, nor of communicating to their capital the views of the receiving state. Foreign ministries have changed the ways in which embassies operate, particularly in the focus on what sorts of information are reported to head offices.

More and more areas of nation-to-nation business will move away from the traditional diplomatic pattern. This will occur in three ways.

First, more and more subjects will have to be dealt with in regional and international organisations, or between these organisations and other countries.³⁷ Globalisation has increased the number of issues that cannot be solved any other way.

The second effect will be a response from governments to this trend: namely, for themselves to seek regional or international partnerships to increase their negotiating leverage in the pursuit of national objectives. In part, this will also be a reaction to the increasing influence that coalitions of interest groups and motivated individuals will exercise on the international agenda. The circumstances for that to happen increasingly are being created by the 'globalisation effect' – easy movement around the globe – allied to the information revolution.

Thirdly, governments will turn more and more to using non-traditional actors in the pursuit of their foreign policy objectives. This does not mean that they will neglect diplomacy in the traditional sense (by the use of their foreign ministries and their diplomats), but that they will use individuals and groups to pursue aspects of their foreign policy. Some of this practice has always existed in diplomacy. Track Two activities in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), for instance, have enabled governments to advance the security debate in Asia without formally committing themselves to either

37) An example can be seen in the increasing pull towards Brussels of power in the European Union. It may not affect a state's responsibility for foreign affairs and defence so much, but it does affect its power over other sectors.

process or outcomes.³⁸ But, in the future, the nature of the diplomatic game will facilitate – some might say require – increased use of this type of mechanism.

Responding to the challenge: re-thinking how to advance policy goals

Using the technology to advantage

Governments need to respond to the changing circumstances of interaction with citizens, non-state actors, and other governments. Trying to get to grips with the dynamic forces of the Internet requires us to think about new ways of achieving foreign policy goals through engagement with the new players. This can be looked at in two ways: firstly, the technical aspect of having and using the technology; and, secondly, implementing policies across the civil service to change its way of working.

Governments have not been slow in grasping the technology, but generally they have not been able to finance technology purchases for their civil services in the way that the private sector has done. Governments have to equip themselves with the technology, in the best and most cost-effective way they can. This is a question of adequate budgetary planning, and determination to proceed. You can be on the tennis court, but you are under a handicap if your racquet is badly strung.

The literature on foreign policy and the Internet, such as it is, refers often to the inadequacy of the government side's technology. For instance, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the United Kingdom says: 'Our present global infrastructure is good, but static. We need to respond to the challenge'.³⁹ Even in the United States, government agencies feel at a

38) The ARF was established in 1994. It is the principal intergovernmental forum for discussions of security questions in the Asia-Pacific region. Track Two brings together institutions and individuals from around the region who provide ideas and initiatives for the ARF process.

39) Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *e-diplomacy: The FCO Information and Communication Technology Strategy*, (London: FCO, January 2004), at <http://www.fco.gov.uk>.

disadvantage: 'The communications and information infrastructure [of the State Department] is outdated'.⁴⁰

There will always be questions over the right type of technology, the cost, and the features. The security aspects of what passes over the networks have become a subject of major concern for governments. The need for classified communications of one sort or another will always be present, so that the confidentiality of government diplomacy is safeguarded. But there can be no doubt that, without a certain level of modern and performing technology, foreign ministries – and other departments of state – are not equipping themselves well for the playing field.

Defining new policy uses

The real questions revolve around how the policy framework is set to operate in the new environment, and with what outcomes. This is not an easy problem to deal with, even for the commercial sector, so it is not surprising that governments are still finding their way through the maze. As the Director of the Oxford Internet Institute, William Dutton has commented:

Studies of the politics of stakeholders capture important dynamics of policy-making, such as in identifying groups that are left out of the policy process. However, they oversimplify the system of action governing the behaviour of individual players, for example, by expecting policy-makers to respond to pressure from interested groups in ways similar to a billiard ball.⁴¹

The mental adjustments that are needed for the new environment include accepting that the playing field is now peopled by more players who have a legitimate reason for being there (although the questions of legitimacy, responsibility, and veracity are not clear-cut). In addition, governments have to adapt to using the technology to their advantage, rather than seeing it as a tool which others use more effectively, and so stop considering themselves as being automatically on the defensive.

Governments have seen the benefits that the Internet offers society, but have not always known how to adapt the technology to advantage. The delivery of electronic services has been an obvious focus of attention, and the

40) F. C. Carlucci and J. F. Metz, *Memorandum to the President on State Department Reform*, February 2001, at <http://www.cfr.org>.

41) Dutton, *Society on the Line*, p. 288.

communication tools this offers have been seen to be powerful. The dialogue with civil society and citizens has been given less attention. What is clear is that the ways in which citizens can engage with the central government have altered:

The Internet has contributed to the wider availability of public electronic information. But it is insufficient just to have the technological mechanisms to access and deliver information. 'Open government' also depends on the degree to which public agencies wish – or are obliged – to make information in electronic form available to citizens.⁴²

Opportunities for new forms of governance

The rules-based system, in which most international transactions between governments take place, is finding it hard to define how the information revolution should be managed. As a general rule, governments like to know the legal responsibilities of those with whom they deal. Dealing with another government is, broadly speaking, a known quantity; dealing with the amorphous circumstances of the Web is not. Whether it be establishing the provenance of information, identifying that electronic interlocutors are who they claim to be, or determining legal liabilities for content, governments will want to engage with other governments in efforts to clarify the rules.

Some cases may be more amenable to solution. For instance, attacking crimes such as paedophilia attracts a great deal of intergovernmental support and allows for prosecution for offences which might occur in uncertain territory. But in other areas of government-to-government activity, rule setting will not be easy. Questions will arise as to whether this is best settled in a bilateral, regional, or international context. The larger the number of countries participating, the greater the coverage, but the more difficult will it be to make progress.

The questions of governance around the Internet continue to be widely discussed, and seeing that the technology can affect many aspects of the life of its citizens, governments tend to look for a framework in which to operate. However, there is as yet no clear picture of whether or how the rules might be set. Different approaches to this issue are visible in different western societies.

In addition, the Internet itself is hard to govern. Some see its freedom from control as a condition of its operation. Others are less certain. Aspects of

42) Dutton, *Society on the Line*, p. 183.

Web use are condemned: some questions attract almost universal condemnation; others depend on the openness of the society concerned.

Freedom of information and e-diplomacy

There is some uncharted territory ahead for foreign ministries as they develop their use of the Web in carrying out both open diplomacy and public consultation. We have seen that it is almost impossible to stop the reach of information and communication technologies or who has access to them, at least in western democracies. As the right to open information that is the basis of these democracies clearly extends to electronic material, freedom of information requirements apply. In New Zealand, for instance, the presumption is that information 'shall be made available unless there is good reason for withholding it'.⁴³

There has always been a point in the provision of advice to governments, and not just in the foreign policy field, where conflict arises between the practise of providing free and frank advice from officials to ministers – from the public servant to the executive branch of government – and the right of the public to have access to that advice under freedom of information provisions. This issue pre-dates the wide availability of digital networks, for instance with the New Zealand Freedom of Information Act being passed in 1982.

The tendency in most democratic societies has been to increase the provision of information to citizens and organisations. The legislation codifying this practise is relatively recent in some countries. For instance, the UK Freedom of Information Act took effect in January 2005, although there has long been provision in other British legislation to provide for the release of official information.

Legislation generally protects against disclosure of free and frank advice from officials to ministers; the extent of that protection is tested in New Zealand, for instance by appeals to the Ombudsman. The right to give free and frank advice is not an automatic guarantee of the right to withhold information. E-mails have been declared to be within the net of information that may be releasable.⁴⁴

43) New Zealand Official Information Act 1982, Part I section 5.

44) The Hutton enquiry in the UK in 2003 – on the death of an expert on weapons of mass destruction and related media reports on the Government's presentation of intelligence information regarding the war in Iraq – resulted in the release of electronic

As the technology moves us towards more open policy debate in any area of government policy, the two principles – the right to withhold advice, and the requirement for open government – will come into conflict more than is currently the case. On current trends, we shall see a tremendous growth in the amount of information held electronically. A major challenge will be to manage this. An electronic consultative process will bring into greater focus the point at which consultation stops and decision-making begins, in order to enable the government to do its constitutional business.⁴⁵ We can expect that foreign ministries will be required to make public more and more of the policy-making part of their processes. The difficult decisions of what constitutes free and frank advice will be more frequently made.

Setting frameworks for e-consultation

Almost all governments have decided to embrace the new communications media as a tool for the betterment of their societies. E-government has become an industry. Most governments, and certainly all democratic ones, claim that they are working to improve the outcomes of society electronically. For instance, here is the New Zealand government view:

E-government is a way for governments to use the new technologies to provide people with more convenient access to government information and services, to improve the quality of the services, and to provide greater opportunities to participate in our democratic institutions and processes.⁴⁶

One can see that the emphasis is on the provision of government services, and the opportunities to improve and extend their reach. These include such things as registration for voting; access to welfare services; and paying one's taxes. There are obvious parallels here between what takes place in e-commerce in the commercial sector and 'selling' government products – the range of services governments provide to their citizens online.

material that, until that point, might have been thought privileged (see <http://www.the-hutton-inquiry.org.uk>).

45) In the case of Estonia, for instance, the current practice of electronic consultation for cabinet papers provides for the cut-off point to be 24 hours before the papers are circulated to ministers for their consideration.

46) State Services Commission, *E-government – A Vision for New Zealanders*, Wellington, New Zealand, 2003, at <http://www.e-government.govt.nz>.

In this drive to employ the new technologies, democratic governments have not overlooked the use of the tool to develop policy formulation. To quote the New Zealand Government again:

Consider a situation where a ministry [a department of state] proposes to make changes to the way it provides a particular service. It could outline the proposed policy changes on its internet site and seek comment from people who would have something to say about those services, and the proposed new policy. The feedback could be used to refine that policy.⁴⁷

The view of the United Kingdom government is similar:

New technology offers unprecedented opportunities for modernisation throughout our society. We are at the start of an information revolution which is changing the way companies do business and the way citizens get many of the services and goods they need. This Government wants the UK to be at the forefront of development in the new global economy. We must establish the best environment in the world for electronic commerce in which new technology industries can thrive. Success in this emerging knowledge economy will be vital for our future prosperity.⁴⁸

To give an example from the New Zealand experience, the New Zealand Associate Minister of Information Technology released a press statement electronically on 17 May 2004 to invite public discussion on the Government's proposals for amending legislation to deal with 'spam', unrequested and usually unwanted e-mail (see <http://www.med.govt.nz>). This announced a six-week period for submissions from the public and interested parties, and also offered a workshop during the consultation period. Finally, he promised that 'views expressed in submissions will be taken into account in the policy development process'.

Although one can find examples of this sort of consultation in many western democracies, governments are still feeling their way. Government departments are just at the start of the experience of dealing with the technology as a policy tool, as opposed to an information tool. In the New Zealand example, we see a reference to involving citizens in the debate about

47) State Services Commission, *E-government*.

48) Cabinet Office, *e-Government: A Strategic Framework for Public Services in the Information Age*, (London: Cabinet Office, April, 2000), at <http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk>.

policy and policy changes. Most government ministries in New Zealand now involve the general public in such consultation on aspects of their policy. Sometimes this approach is broad brush, inviting comments by e-mail on aspects of the department's work. Sometimes it is specific: seeking comment on particular issues of policy.

The Websites of ministries in many countries are becoming more replete with information, more sophisticated in their presentation, more timely in the posting of material, and more inviting of comment from the visitor. Attempts to be more interactive are growing. As departments – and ministers – start to get confidence in their use of the technology, we can expect electronic consultation to develop significantly. Up to now, governments have left something of a vacuum into which other, non-government, players have entered. We know that the use of the technology by NGOs is well established. Their Websites are sophisticated and generally solicit opinion from the visitor. And because most NGOs coalesce around a cause, or related aspects of public policy, they tend to be strong advocates in those areas.

One central issue that governments have to deal with is trying to establish the point at which the right to participate ceases as the government goes about its constitutional business of deciding policy. The civil servant who advises government has traditionally, at some point in the process, passed the decision-making to elected representatives, either as ministers or as a collective government. In a participatory democracy, a line is drawn between the right to participate and the authority of decision.

For ministries/departments, this question in the new era of instant communications is not very different in its substance from the question that has always had to be addressed. The change today is that more and more policy debate is open, and therefore the non-governmental actor is increasingly on the stage. But the speed of information dissemination will change the frequency with which the question is asked.

Electronic discussion and consultation strategies in foreign ministries

The foreign policy adviser has to devise, establish, manage, and participate in electronic forums for policy debate. These should at least respond to the genuine expectations of the non-state actor, while at the same time endeavouring to create a climate of confidence that the policy debate through electronic means will be valued by the department involved and, more crucially, by the central government. This kind of electronic networking will supplement, not replace, the consultative mechanisms that are already in

place using more traditional methods, such as correspondence, meetings, and organised debates.

Looking at selected foreign ministries, we can see an emerging pattern of electronic discussion. A survey of a number of Websites⁴⁹ reveals a useful set of databases of foreign policy information, accompanied in some cases by invitations to visitors to the site to contribute their views on policy issues.⁵⁰

In some foreign ministries, there is a more deliberate process of consultation using electronic means, such as the ministry's Website and e-mail. The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, for instance, undertook a consultation process electronically with interested New Zealand companies and organisations in the period December 2003 to January 2004, in order to ascertain attitudes towards, and views on, the Government's forthcoming negotiations with Thailand on a free trade agreement (see <http://www.mfat.govt.nz> for more details). A further example is the case of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade seeking views on a closer economic relationship with China, or the Department of Foreign Affairs of Canada which, in 2003, invited electronic contributions to a discussion on the broad principles of Canadian foreign policy (see <http://www.dfat.gov.au> and <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca>).

These dialogues reflect a planned process within the ministries concerned, largely through an agenda over which the department concerned has some control. What is less capable of being pre-planned is how to react to the immediate event.⁵¹ This problem concerns all foreign ministries. In a world where international developments can be reported so quickly, and the time for considered reaction is so reduced, there is no mechanism which can put foreign ministries beyond the risk of surprise. Risk management is, essentially, what foreign ministries do, but not all risks are manageable through planning. This is the 'zone' of foreign policy that is largely reactive, not pro-active, and as we have seen earlier in this study, the number of spectacular cases of events blowing careful and steady diplomacy out of the water is increasing, as people use communications technology to make their interventions.

49) UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, US State Department, Foreign Affairs Canada, Finnish Foreign Ministry, Estonian Foreign Ministry, Singapore Foreign Ministry, to name a few.

50) For instance, <http://www.state.gov>, which does not promise a reply, but implies one.

51) Harold Macmillan's famous response in 1963 to an interviewer's question about what worried him as Prime Minister, 'events, dear boy, events', encapsulates this pretty well.

There are, nonetheless, some strategies of engagement which can be usefully employed. Today what is important is speed and accuracy, and foreign ministries can use the technology to their advantage in this regard. Regular engagement with civil society through use of the Website and e-mail should allow ministries to build up confidence that they can use the technology in a sustained and informed manner. Carrying out policy discussion online should be embraced. As citizens get used to 'buying' government services online, they will also become more interested in proceeding from that 'commercial' aspect of electronic communication to giving expression to their views on policy (and government decision-making). For instance, just establishing which interlocutors are 'out there', so that databases are well monitored for accuracy and reliability, is a preliminary and essential step.

Using the Web to advantage

An even more important use of the dissemination tools is to ensure that information is readily available, and distributed speedily and widely, in an attempt to inform the foreign policy debate. This means putting more of a government's views of international policy on Websites and encouraging their use by civil society.

Keeping an up-to-date Website is a challenge, particularly for smaller countries that might not have the expertise to cover a wide range of international issues. Choices can be made about the areas where comprehensive coverage can be maintained. Foreign ministries have a range of useful, analytical information from their posts around the world which can be used to this purpose. In a world where there is competition over the reliability and accuracy of, and access to, information, and where confidentiality becomes harder to maintain, foreign ministries might want to share more of what they know. They may have the advantage of informed judgements that will convince by their reliability and accuracy. As we have seen, the development of policy papers, which may originally have been used for internal use within the government, can more and more be released for public discussion.

There is also a need to encourage contributions to Websites from those who are not part of government. Well-informed pieces that flesh out a department's Website should be posted as well. These might range from the factual to the theoretical: a journalist could contribute reports, for instance; and a non-government organisation comment on progress in international negotiations of an issue with which it is identified. Borrowing from the printed media, 'op-ed' comment pieces could be a regular feature of the site. Bringing

more authoritative and credible commentators on to a foreign ministry's Website will increase the reach of that site – and its credibility.

On broader policy issues, ministries should draw up a programme of engagement with civil society to be carried out on an annual or biennial basis. The Canadian example mentioned above, where the broad principles of Canadian foreign policy were examined, is an ambitious attempt to consult. Working with civil society, with interest groups, and NGOs could create an ambitious programme of debate and discussion that should help elucidate the broader public debate. It should also give governments a confidence that citizens were better informed of the issues, and better involved in the policy process.

Consultation with other stakeholders is going to be an important part of electronic services for any foreign ministry. Moving into an interactive mode – both giving and receiving – will require some careful planning about content, style and process. A number of alternatives suggest themselves, such as a chat room moderated by either the department concerned or by a third party. Another is targeted delivery to subscribers of a daily or weekly update of relevant material. Discussion groups are a third, possibly offering the best alternative for government ministries that do not have large resources to service electronic publishing, in that such groups have more structure and can be limited in number. This method may also offer the advantage of more targeted discussion, with the aim of obtaining more pertinent commentary on issues of foreign policy.

This raises an important question for ministries moving into more consultative processes – the choice of participant. At present, an Internet service is open to whoever chooses to access it. Participative consultation tends to suggest that one knows who is participating, and what their interest is in the dialogue. It may, for instance, matter that a participant is a national of the country concerned, or at least a tax payer.

Looking further, the question arises of tracking what information is on the Web, and seeing how it may impinge on foreign policy. Given the volume of material, it may be that governments will have to resort to commercial services to provide them with summaries of information.⁵² Search engines may also provide a partial answer, if they can be tailored in a way that allows them to deliver an appropriate level of information to an individual user, or group

52) At another level of government involvement, intelligence services will also want to monitor electronic space.

of users, for instance to the part of a foreign ministry dealing with southern Africa, or that manages the debate on transnational people smuggling.

Encompassing the Diasporas

A use of ICTs which foreign ministries might want to consider is to help bring together in an electronic community those members of its country's expatriate population that constitute its Diasporas. The increased mobility of people and the skilled knowledge that so many take with them, as well as the enhanced communications nerve-system of a globalised society, will increase the significance of Diasporas – particularly for small countries without the resources to install embassies and government offices across the globe. Such Diasporas offer a potential resource that is available for any home country to draw on, if the circumstances and processes can be well managed. The Web and e-mail provide ideal tools for this.

The Diasporas have to be looked at in two dimensions: those from one's own country who have moved away; and those from another country who have moved to you. The same techniques, messages, and communications strategy will not necessarily work with both sides, but there are ways in which both can be harnessed to good effect. Participation by the Diasporas depends, of course, on the willingness of the people concerned to participate in exercises conducted by public bodies. For instance, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade might expect a different sort of input from a New Zealand citizen of Indian descent living in New Zealand than it would from a New Zealand citizen of non-Indian descent living in India, or even from a New Zealand citizen of Indian descent who has returned to live in India.

Conclusions

Coming to grips with technological change is never a straightforward adjustment for governments. The adjustment to the Internet is a good example of this. There are issues of usage and governance that do not easily fit into the context of government regulation. The bewildering amount of information sent electronically is difficult to comprehend and digest. The opening of access to so many different people in many different parts of the world means that foreign ministries are dealing with many more clients than they did even ten years ago.

Citizens expect their governments to be able to ‘manage’ foreign policy so that their perceived interests are protected from deleterious consequences, and their prosperity and security advanced in the face of uncertainty. They want the influence of their country to be acknowledged by outside players, and their values to be recognised. Information and knowledge, two of the key components of personal and community wellbeing, are now more easily shared than in the past, and on a global scale. Immediacy, ubiquity, and cheap cost have come together to alter our perceptions of the world around us. The advantage of greater universal sharing of information is matched, of course, by a greater competition to get one’s views heard. These changes, however, create opportunities for building and using new communities of interest.

The communications revolution has opened up the world of international relations in an unprecedented way. The foreign policy adviser is perhaps more affected by the changes than other members of a government bureaucracy because the world being dealt with has come closer to everybody. In this context, understanding what is happening presents us with a conundrum. It is easier to ‘know’ more because information flows more easily, and there is ever more material on which to base one’s knowledge. On the other hand, it is also more difficult to comprehend more, as the flows are so large that judgements are made in a jumbled context.

This is what foreign policy advisers have to accept as the new framework in international relations. There are new networks over which information passes. There are new players on these new networks: players who might be individuals or groups. They will form, re-form, and break up. Involvement can be ephemeral and transitory. There are new issues which require not just regional and multilateral cooperation to resolve, but in the negotiation of which the place for governments is reduced, and the place for other networks enhanced. The contacts between states and between individuals in different states are now conducted through so many channels that governments cannot preserve a monopoly in foreign policy. There is also less trust amongst citizens as to the capability of governments in interpreting the world for them.

In this confusing landscape, it would be easy to predict that the days of the foreign policy adviser are numbered. Fighting to preserve a margin of expertise, dealing with a myriad of issues, reacting to a flood of breaking news: all make it difficult to preserve a margin of expertise and judgement. Predicting the future course of events in international affairs, which has been one of the principal functions of a foreign ministry, is now inherently unstable. Perhaps, diplomacy will have to accept that there is no solution to this problem. It will definitely have to accept that the power of the new

communications technology is such that the ability of non-intermediated players to play a role beyond that which they have in the past is a permanent feature of the policy-making field.

But Foreign Ministers still, at least in western democracies, fulfil their constitutional obligations, and still rely on advice to enable them to do so. Ministers themselves are faced with pressures from the information revolution that their predecessors did not have to deal with.⁵³ One of the pressures of this information age on governments is to make more public and more accountable what they do and say in international affairs. This is not in the modern tradition. It was in the old: Thucydides records that ambassadors from the Greek city states delivered their messages to the governments of Athens before a concerned public. A well-informed public is essential to the carriage of any government policy, and foreign policy is no exception. Almost automatically, the information revolution is going to bring about a better informed public.

Foreign policy advisers can welcome that. Operating in a climate where the reach of knowledge has been increased does make the explanation of the considerations in any government's foreign policy easier to communicate. The problems which face individual states are more and more capable of resolution or mitigation only at a regional or international level. Solutions to these problems – crime; resources management; terrorism; people-smuggling – are difficult to negotiate. In these circumstances, a more informed international community, linked by greater and faster information flows, provides a better stage on which diplomats can operate than one where information is restricted, and where others who can be involved have recognised knowledge and, possibly, the trust of the public.

Diplomacy requires knowledge, judgement, and expertise. Negotiating with the Internet does not change that. It just demands adaptation to the world around us. Adaptation is not a matter of choice. It is a core task.

53) Consider the contrast with Lord Palmerston's saying that, with regard to the Schleswig-Holstein problem, there were only three people who understood it: one was dead; the second was insane; and the third was Palmerston himself, but he had forgotten what he knew of it.