



**Clingendael**

Netherlands Institute of International Relations

# Diplomacy in the Digital Age

**Brian Hocking**  
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**Clingendael Report**

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# Executive Summary

There is an explosion of commentary on the implications of the digital age for diplomacy. Digitalization has a major impact on diplomacy, both in terms of the forms in which it is conducted and its structures at all levels. The current debate separates differing understandings of the impact of digitalization on foreign policy: at one extreme, the 'cyber-utopians' and at the other, the 'cyber-realists'.

## **What are the main characteristics of the debate on digital diplomacy?**

- There is a lack of definitional precision.
- Most of the debate focuses on the social media.
- 'Digital diplomacy' is a shorthand term embracing broader changes in diplomacy pre-dating digitalization.

## **As a study in diplomacy, the aim of the report is to consider:**

- The meaning of general ideas in the developing debate – specifically the concept of digital diplomacy.
- The relationship between more general patterns of change in diplomacy and digitalization.
- The impact of digitalization on the diplomatic process and the national machinery of diplomacy.

## **What do we mean by the 'digital age'?**

- We need to take a broader view: e-government and e-participation are part of the landscape of digital diplomacy and help us to interpret how digitalization is impacting on domestic as well as international policy environments.

## **How is diplomacy affected by the broader digitalized environment?**

- History offers useful lessons: the introduction of the electric telegraph illustrates how technologies impact differentially on diplomatic institutions.
- In the digital age diplomatic missions are becoming a more salient part of a decentralized internal MFA network while external MFA partners are increasingly important for policy success. Unsurprisingly, existing diplomatic culture clashes with the imperatives of speed and 'horizontalization'.
- Recent experience with public diplomacy suggests that new communications related developments within foreign ministries pass through a cycle from skepticism to hype to acceptance and mainstreaming.

## **Offline and Online Perspectives on Diplomacy**

Digital diplomacy is often equated with public diplomacy but also includes a number of other perspectives:

- **Changing foreign policy agendas:** with issues of speed, less control over events and agendas; and with work processes and organizational structures adapted to networked diplomacy in the digital age.
- **Cyber agendas:** digital diplomacy as a set of negotiating problems and scenarios: for example, Internet freedom, Internet governance and cybersecurity.

- **Knowledge management:** the problem of managing data – including big data – effectively and using resources to best effect.
- **Service delivery:** utilising digital resources in performing consular work and crisis management.

There are two contrasting ways of looking at the position of diplomacy in the digital age: **gradual change** and adaptation within the existing frameworks and principles **versus a fundamental break** with accepted patterns of behaviour, norms and rules.

It is hard to predict how **'digital disruption'** – including the positive and negative impact of digitalization on diplomacy – will play out. The picture is complicated by underlying 'offline' trends in diplomatic practice, showing a growing 'hybridity' of diplomacy now paralleled by greater 'hybridity' of the global media.

## Digitalization: Diplomatic Processes and Structures

The broader context of diplomatic change and adaptation needs to be analyzed at two levels: diplomatic *processes*, geared towards the functions of diplomacy, and diplomatic *structures*, paying special attention to institutions of diplomacy such as foreign ministries.

In the diplomatic arena all things 'online' blend with the 'offline': ICT trends impact on pre-existing, hybrid modes of diplomacy. Digital diplomacy builds on trends predating web 2.0 based forms of communication and the rise of social media.

Models of diplomacy coalescing around different policy agendas involve distinct digital communication requirements.

The **consular diplomacy** challenge is the most pressing one, with citizens demanding the speedy delivery of government services meeting both the technological standard set by society and the human touch.

**Public diplomacy** is the area most often singled out for attention in the digital debate. Social networking sites have created new dynamics and opened up a plethora of previously unimaginable opportunities.

The digital revolution has been accompanied by fundamental changes in **international negotiation** processes. Hybridity blurs the distinction between 'online' diplomatic activities and 'offline' diplomacy and negotiation.

## Structures: digitalization, the national diplomatic system and the MFA

We need to look at the MFA in the broader context of the national diplomatic system (NDS) – that is the totality of departments and agencies involved in the shaping and implementation of international policy.

The MFA forms a subsystem within the NDS and this subsystem requires two sets of tools that can be enabled by digitalization: *detectors* for acquiring and processing information and *effectors* for delivering policy.

Digitalization is increasingly important in determining centre-periphery roles and relationships within the integral network of the MFA and its diplomatic missions.

For the MFA it is of central importance to perform as a significant node in information networks. Networking is the basis of contemporary diplomacy, calling for the development and effective use of 'nodality' tools. This is one of the critical areas of digitalization in the diplomatic field.

# Acknowledgements

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In the course of this project we have benefited from exchanging ideas with Corneliu Bjola at Oxford University, and we have met three other ‘digital diplomacy’ experts who make a contribution to a 2015 special issue of *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* on the social media in diplomacy: Ilan Manor from Israel, Juan Luis Manfredi from Spain and Gökhan Yücel from Turkey. We have learned a great deal from discussions with them and their contributions to the journal. In the context of this project we have also collaborated with Jay Wang and other staff at the Centre on Public Diplomacy, University of Southern California, in preparing an online digital diplomacy bibliography.

# 1 Introducing Diplomacy in the Digital Age

This report represents initial reflections on diplomacy in the digital age. In the ongoing debate amongst international relations scholars, information and communication technology (ICT) experts, digital strategists, social media advocates and others, the first question for us is: what is happening to diplomacy?<sup>1</sup> And the obvious answer is what has always happened to it: diplomacy is responding to changes in the international and domestic environment, in the main centres of authority, particularly states, and in the character of societies at home and abroad. The extent to which diplomacy is a social institution is now more visible than ever. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century societal transformations have a much greater impact on diplomacy than in earlier periods, when the authority of elites was questioned less than is the case today. Confronted with fast-moving change in society, governments have a hard time anticipating impending developments, let alone events, even though new technological capabilities appear to enhance the capacity for forecasting future trends.

‘Newness’ in diplomacy today has everything to do with the application of new communications technologies to diplomacy. This issue goes right to the heart of diplomacy’s core functions, including negotiation, representation and communication. Given the centrality of communication in diplomacy, it is hardly surprising that the rise of social media should be of interest to practitioners of diplomacy. Most of them, like people outside diplomatic culture, are in the process of adjusting their ‘analogue’ habits and finding their own voice in a new information sphere. This takes time, and for technological enthusiasts to simply proclaim the arrival of a ‘new statecraft’ in the form of what is variously termed e-diplomacy, digital diplomacy, cyber diplomacy and ‘twiplomacy’ is too simplistic. Paradoxically, greater complexity encourages Nescafé-school analyses and the search for simple explanations about what is happening to diplomacy as the regulating mechanism of the society of states. As in other epochs of fast technological change, the lure of quick fixes addressing multifaceted processes of change in diplomacy appears almost irresistible at the opening of the ‘digital age’.

## Questions with few instant answers

What is it, then, that we wish to convey by employing such terms as ‘digital diplomacy’ and ‘e-diplomacy’? There is clearly more at stake than the advent of new communication technologies. How do we identify and make sense of broader developments that need to

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1 Amongst the growing literature on the theme of ‘digital diplomacy’ and broader reflections on the impact of changes in communications technologies on international relations, see: Simmons, B. ‘Preface: international relationships in the information age’, *International Studies Review*, (special issue) 15, 2013 pp 1-4; Copeland, D. ‘Digital technology’, in Cooper, A., Heine, J. and Thakur, R. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013; Kurbalija, J. ‘The impact of the Internet and ICT on contemporary diplomacy’, in Kerr, P. and Wiseman, G. (eds) *Diplomacy in a Globalizing World: Theories and Practices*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2013; Bjola, C. and Holmes, M. (eds) *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, London, Routledge, 2015; Thomas, T., *Digital Disruption: The Crisis of the State in the Digital Age*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

be taken into account? Historical experience suggests that communication technologies are conditioned by the environments in which they operate and may have different effects depending on the processes and institutions to which they are applied. This is something to bear in mind – as an antidote to presentism and the desire to give instant answers to complex questions.

We recognize that the rise of networking sites like Twitter, Facebook and other social media is important, but the ongoing debate equally needs to address the wider impact of digitalization on the external relations of governments and other international actors. This presents us with two basic questions. First, what is meant by the ‘digital age’? The term appears with increasing frequency but carries with it the same sense of vagueness and imprecision as ‘globalization’. It has provided a meta-narrative for change in diplomacy but references to the ‘digital age’ often fail to spell out or merely imply precisely what is changing and how it affects the nature of diplomatic activity. Second, is ‘digitalization’ part of an ongoing evolutionary process of change and adaptation that has always characterised diplomacy? Or does it represent revolutionary changes, a fundamental ‘time-break’ that warrants the appellation ‘21<sup>st</sup> century statecraft’?

The social media in particular are a magnet to a fast-growing global crowd. Facebook is ‘as big as the world’s largest nation’, and older generations have no other option than catching up with the young. About 90 per cent of people between 18 and 29 are now using social networking sites. Those who stay outside their magnetic field, may find themselves on the periphery of a phenomenon that is here to stay or that will mutate into something very different from past patterns of communication. The attraction of social media has turned this 21<sup>st</sup> century tool of diplomacy into a prime focus for debate, and ‘digilliterates’ seem to have no right to join the conversation. This may help explain why the demands of political correctness probably result in a skewed picture of who in diplomacy is using social networking sites, how, and with what aims and objectives.

## Integrative diplomacy and networking

An excessive focus on the social media conflates new communications technologies with broader dimensions of change in domestic and international policy. We can make our point more clearly by relating this report to an earlier Clingendael study that developed a new framework for diplomacy which we termed ‘integrative diplomacy’.<sup>2</sup> This broader picture of change in the practice of international relations is our interpretation of diplomacy in the digital age. It sees the global environment as characterised by relationships between states and non-state entities, producing complex webs of diplomacy – sometimes competitive, sometimes collaborative. Central to this image are patterns of mutual dependency, policy and actor linkages, and ‘networked’ diplomacy embracing diverse stakeholders. Networking as the conceptual basis of modern diplomatic practice – including its digital dimension – has fundamental implications for conceptualizing and practicing diplomacy, for office routines and rules of engagement among people representing different types of public and private actors, and in a more general sense for officials engaging with the outside world. For the people who

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2 Hocking, B., J. Melissen, S. Riordan, P. Sharp, *Futures for Diplomacy: Integrative Diplomacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, The Hague, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Clingendael, October 2012. A later and shorter version of this report is: ‘Integrative Diplomacy in the 21st Century’, *China International Strategy Review 2013*. Beijing: Foreign Languages University Press, 2013.

work for government, networking implies a fundamental willingness to adapt to ‘interface cultures’ that are radically different from those of more familiar but increasingly outdated hierarchical environments.

## Hybridity and the integration of ‘online’ and ‘offline’

Three related assumptions guide this contribution to the discussion about diplomacy in the digital age. First, **the tools of the digital age create new issues and routines, and simultaneously redefine existing ones.** Old phenomena take on new dimensions and they do so in all spheres of human interaction. There are many examples of behavioral mutations in the diplomatic world. Diplomatic missions’ outreach to the societies of host countries, for instance, is as old as diplomacy itself, and ‘offline’ public diplomacy work has received a great deal of attention in the public outreach strategies of foreign ministries. The penetration and interaction with foreign publics has however taken on entirely new dimensions in the digital age and reaches well beyond the West. The US Embassy in Jakarta has over 600,000 likes on its Facebook account, and European embassies in Beijing use the Chinese microblog Sina Weibo to engage with swathes of the population out of their reach in the age of offline diplomacy. The Chinese leadership encourages its embassies throughout the world to take advantage of Twitter, while this US-based platform is blocked at home.

Diplomatic coalition building and networking are affected by digital developments, which is perhaps most clearly visible in the more experimental human rights’ and official development aid fields. The digital domain for instance opens up new forms of engagement opportunities for Dutch transnational campaigning in favour of LGBT rights, UK actions aimed at the prevention of sexual violence, and Swedish policy initiatives supporting vulnerable citizens, including mothers and their unborn children. Even a relatively traditional multi-stakeholder network like the OECD/DAC initiated Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation – aiming at getting extreme poverty ‘to zero in one generation’ – is likely to become progressively digital when it reaches out to non-state actors and promotes greater youth involvement.

Second, **hybridity is the norm in the current media and diplomatic environments.**<sup>3</sup> The evolution of communications technologies rarely involves the supplanting of one form by another. More typically, existing forms of communication adapt to the emergence of new technologies. They help generate rapidly evolving ‘hybrid’ media environments in which traditional media are adapting to new ‘online’ ways of conceptualizing, sharing and visualizing ‘the news’.

In diplomacy, the balance between old and new forms of communication is different and appears not to reflect similar revolutionary changes. Things may not be what they seem at first sight – and media reports sometimes only tell part of the story. When in the spring of 2015 Pope Francis publicly referred to the “first genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” in Armenia, Turkish foreign minister Mevlüt Cavusoglu was quick to get world attention by voicing his protest through Twitter. But obviously this move was only the opening shot, and paralleled by traditional diplomatic initiatives through less visible channels. Various technological revolutions have not led to newly invented means of communication entirely taking over from tried and tested ones. But in future diplomacy we expect to see the progressive adoption

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3 Chadwick, A. *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2013.

of a mix of 'old' and 'new' modes of communication – within governmental networks, in transnational multi-stakeholder environments, and in both friendly and antagonistic relations between states.

In a more general sense, diplomacy is characterized by hybridity. State-based diplomacy is not irrelevant but it assumes more complex forms, is adapting its structures to new demands, and the roles performed by its practitioners are changing. We are presented with a milieu in which traditional diplomatic forms and processes are interacting to produce more diverse and complex diplomatic scenarios. As far as such scenarios involve non-traditional actors, they will expect that governments adapt to the networking norms of public-private environments – and indeed accept the use of digital tools increasingly used outside the sphere of government.

Third, **the challenges posed by digital technologies will demand strategies dealing with the integration of 'online' and 'offline' environments.** In their book *The New Digital Age*, Eric Schmidt, Chairman of Google, and Jared Cohen, one of the architects of the '21<sup>st</sup> century statecraft' in Hillary Clinton's State Department, argue that the revolution in communications technologies mean that governments will have to develop two general orientations – and two foreign policies – the online and the offline.<sup>4</sup> Whilst appreciating the thrust of their argument, we want to express the problem facing governments and diplomats in a slightly different form.

The juxtaposition of 'digital' and 'analogue' has clear limits. There are highly significant changes in the 'offline' world of diplomacy that intersect with the emerging 'online' world. Just as the 'real world' of contemporary diplomacy is not captured in the dichotomous categories of state and non-state actors locked in zero sum relationships, so digital technologies will demand a transition facilitating the integration of 'analogue' and 'digital' environments impacting on government. Rather than separate foreign policies attuned to each, the real test – now and increasingly in the future – will be integrating the two. The speed and the scope with which foreign ministries will be confronted with this challenge will be faster and probably more encompassing than anything they have experienced since their invention in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It will require a redefinition of roles and new diplomatic skills, and involve a challenge to vertical organizational structures and traditional work processes within foreign ministries. The good news is that new technologies facilitate such fundamental change requiring the integration of existing analogue and emerging digital spaces.

## The structure of this report

The remainder of this report is divided into chapter 2 The Context of the Digital Age; chapter 3 Offline and Online Perspectives; and chapter 4 The Changing DNA of Diplomacy, followed by Conclusions in chapter 5.

Chapter 2 sets the scene for the discussion by placing the changes associated with digitalization in their broader societal context. This is relevant and necessary as a background to the ensuing discussion on diplomacy in the digital age. Much of the history of diplomacy

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4 Schmidt E., and J. Cohen, *The New Digital Age, Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business*, London, John Murray, 2013.

has paid insufficient attention to the societal context in which international relations have developed. Such an approach was problematic in earlier eras, and is wholly inadequate today.

The underlying issue of the changing character of diplomacy is the focus of chapter 3. Much of what is attributed to the rise of new communications technologies actually predates them. There is a broader story to tell, and there are a number of concerns related to the concept of 'digital diplomacy'. One of them is definitional vagueness. Discussions tend to embrace a range of concepts and quite loosely argued propositions that are reminiscent of the popularization of the notion of 'soft power'. Thus the term 'cyber diplomacy' may be a synonym for 'digital diplomacy' or focus on regime development in the cyberspace agenda – such as Internet freedom, 'net neutrality' and Internet governance.

Another problem relates to causality. Recently, the focus of attention has been the role of social media in events such as the 'Arab Spring' and the potential for this phenomenon to revolutionize the conduct of international policy. As with the 'CNN effect', supposedly determining change in US foreign policy during the Clinton administration, the impact of these media on politics and political decision-making has been exaggerated and/or misinterpreted. A third point affects the scope of the debate. In recent years much of the digital diplomacy discourse has been incorporated in discussions about public diplomacy, but it is clear that digital diplomacy has implications outside this narrative. There is also a danger of exaggerating the diplomatic use of social media by professionals used to operating confidentially and seeing information as power. The hype about digital diplomacy conceals the fact that there are still plenty of diplomats who feel unfamiliar, insecure or uncomfortable with microblogging and exchanging information in the open domain, or who may have very good reasons for working 'offline'.

Chapter 4, the largest part of this report, deals with a number of questions related to the impact of digital technology on selected diplomatic processes and structures. What are the implications of digitalization on traditional diplomatic practices, in particular related to the functions of communication and negotiation? At the most fundamental level, does the rise of a more participative, interactive diplomatic environment transform our understanding of the essence of diplomacy? Does the digital revolution require a fundamental re-evaluation of the rules and practices of a state based diplomatic system in a networked world? How is the advent of digital diplomacy impacting on the multilateral and national arenas? How are ministries of foreign affairs adapting to new forms of communication in areas such as public diplomacy, consular work and crisis management? To what extent is the digital age reshaping the relationships between the MFA and the network of diplomatic posts?

The conclusions aim to bring together the general concerns with the nature and impact of the digital age on government and society and its implications for diplomacy. We make some suggestions as to how national diplomatic structures in particular might respond to the demands of a changing international and domestic environment.

## 2 Contexts: Defining the Digital Age

If the first casualty in war is truth, then the first casualty in the world of diplomacy when confronted with significant change in communications technologies is balance. Hence the oft-quoted reaction to the introduction of the electric telegraph from the British foreign secretary, Lord Palmerston: 'My God, this is the end of diplomacy!' Taking a less histrionic view but one nevertheless skeptical of the place of newish technologies in the delicate world of diplomacy, astute analyst of diplomatic practice Harold Nicolson, writing in the 1960s, would lament the impact of the telephone as 'a dangerous little instrument through which to convey information or to transmit instructions'. One of the most important assets of sound diplomacy he suggested is precision and the telephone failed to promote it.<sup>5</sup>

Much has changed in the past half century, and even in the past ten years. Social media have added an important real-time dimension to diplomacy, making communication ultra-fast and, by necessity, often less precise. For the first time, foreign ministries have no other option than allowing diplomats with delegated authority to make mistakes in the social media – and to correct such mishaps immediately and preferably repeatedly. There will be no immediate consensus among diplomats, though, as to how to use the social media, neither is there a generational gap between luddites wary of change and technophiles with sympathies in the opposite direction. And while some diplomats embrace change as an opportunity to reform their profession, to others it represents a challenge to established conventions and may simply be 'dangerous' to proven and accepted forms of conducting international relations – or to their own self-interest. The impact of the Internet and the rise of social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook, are generating a wealth of reactions.

What do we mean when use the term 'digital age'? The deeper issue goes beyond diplomatic adaptation to speed and openness. It focuses on the relationship between technological change and the broader societal context in which it occurs.<sup>6</sup> The debates on the recent rise of Islamic State reflect differing views on the impact of the Internet between 'cyber-utopians' – adherents of the view that social revolutions may be the product of the digital revolution – and the 'cyber-realists'. The latter, whilst not denying the importance of the Internet and the various tools it has engendered, make the point that social change is the product of human agency, much of it occurring in offline environments.<sup>7</sup> As the chief exponent of the concept of the 'network society', Manuel Castells, points out, communications technologies are not at the root of social movements, these result from conflicts and contradictions in societies.<sup>8</sup>

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5 Nicolson, H. 'Diplomacy then and now', *Foreign Affairs*, October 1961.

6 Huxley, A. *Discovering Digital Diplomacy: the Case of Mediatization in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland*. Dissertation: Master Programme in Social Sciences Digital Media and Society, Uppsala University, August 2014.

7 Morozov, E. 'Facebook and Twitter are just places revolutionaries go', *The Guardian*, 7 March 2011.

8 Castells, M. *Networks of Outrage and Networks of Hope: social movements in the Internet age*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012: p. 235.

The long-standing debate between technological determinist and social constructivist interpretations of change is not simply an academic matter, but significant to our understanding of the environment in which diplomacy is functioning. Those seeking to manage international policy need to appreciate how and why the digital communications revolution is significant and how and why human agency remains of prime importance.

## Learning from history

Looking at past experiences of communications 'revolutions' such as the electric telegraph in the nineteenth century, whilst time bound, can provide clues as to how diplomatic process and structures responded to change in an earlier era. Telegraphy, of course, was a very different form of communications revolution. Compared with the age of the Internet, the telegraph's impact was of limited scope and it hardly ranks as a form of 'mass media' in the sense that the term was to acquire in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But there are lessons to be learned from the impact of the telegraph on government and society, and the relationship between them. Nickles' penetrating analysis suggests that the effect of the telegraph on diplomacy raises four questions.<sup>9</sup>

First, *is a new technology likely to alter human behaviour?* The experience of the telegraph reveals the significance of diplomatic agency here. At the individual level, existing diplomatic culture frequently clashed with the imperatives of speed. Patterns of work changed in response to the demands of virtually instantaneous communication but these were not uniformly standardised. Two of the great contrasts with the nineteenth century are of course the impact of parliamentary democracy on diplomatic practice and the 'embeddedness' in society of the institutions of diplomacy and people on their payroll, i.e. the way in which its 'societization' places constraints on diplomacy.

Second, *does a technology act as a tool or constraint?* Here, a critical effect of telegraphy was to greatly enhance the speed of events – particularly during crises. Governments came under greater pressure to respond to the quickening pace of events and to the demands of public opinion and the press at home, echoing the 'total diplomacy' of the second half of the twentieth century and after. At the same time, the telegraph could provide information much faster – if not always in a totally reliable form – reflected in today's 'virtual diplomacy'.

Third, *does a technology produce authoritarian or democratic power structures?* The effect of the telegraph was to reinforce authoritarian power structures in which vertical linkages were strengthened rather than the horizontal social networks associated with democratic technologies. The general feeling expressed by many, but not all, ambassadors was that the new technology had reduced their scope for action and their overall importance. By contrast, the digital age and new modes of communication facilitate a dual network dynamic. It is more likely than not, that foreign ministries will progressively service diplomatic missions that are becoming an increasingly important part of the decentralized, internal MFA network; and external MFA partners are increasingly important for policy success. They resist the imposition of the age-old rulebook of diplomacy on an expanding network environment in which government is only one player.

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9 Nickles D. *Under the Wire: How the Telegraph changed Diplomacy*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2003.

Finally, *does a technology tend to reflect and enhance existing social trends or mark a new departure in human affairs?* The telegraph was a hugely significant innovation, it tended to reinforce broader trends such as other modes of faster communication, patterns of economic development, social change and the expanding role of government. Similarly, digital innovations are epiphenomenal, an expression of broader patterns of change, and as such the term ‘digital diplomacy’ can be seen as a metaphor for profound change in policy environments demanding diplomatic adaptation.

## Big data

Big data affects diplomacy in a number of ways reflecting developments in the changing relationship between government and society, and radical changes facing the business community and wider the economic environment beyond the scope of this study.

The ‘big data’ phenomenon is characterized by the sheer growth in the quantity of digital information that is being produced and stored on a daily basis and, crucially, the fast-growing capacity for automated analyses of such data. In 2000 only 25% of the world’s stored information was in digital form; by 2014, the figure had increased to around 98%. The terms ‘big data’ and ‘open data’ are sometimes used interchangeably, but are not synonymous. Governments or companies may disclose information as part of an ‘open data’ policy, mostly in the interests of transparent governance. By contrast, ‘big data’ accessible to a variety of organizations are generated inadvertently by use of the internet and the telephone. Whereas there is considerable suspicion of potentially ‘Orwellian’ government utilising ‘big data’, international organizations in particular can take advantage of ‘big data’ to enhance their legitimacy. The UN Global Pulse initiative, for instance, is applying data mining to social causes, using ‘Big Data for Development’, and the World Economic Forum is also studying ‘Data Driven Development’.<sup>10</sup>

The growth of ‘datafication’ means that, almost imperceptibly, size permits the acceptance of inaccuracy. There is a discernible trend in the direction of causality being replaced by correlation, and a risk of trivialization of the distinction between the two. It is important to underline such crucial differences, as it is to bear in mind that ‘big data’ cannot be used to make a prognosis of future developments. The potential for policy lies in the capacity of ‘big data’ to detect certain patterns in human behaviour and the characteristics of groups of people – but this young field is fraught with risks of inappropriate use, for instance when large swathes of information are used in a deterministic fashion for ‘profiling’ of individuals and groups.<sup>11</sup> For some, a danger is the gradual triumph of data over politics as governments come to accept the immutability of huge swathes of information over political debate and policy choice, and the application of common sense to human affairs.

‘Big data’ can be used on a continuum ranging from crisis management support to speeding up policy-making and negotiation processes, mapping social movements in the interests of tailoring diplomatic initiatives to local needs, policy evaluation with real-time feedback, and using big data for policy planning purposes. Foreign ministries are acutely aware of the fact that access to large data bases has implications for diplomacy’s age-old functions,

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10 ‘Big Data’, Strategy Advisory Unit, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, background note, 2015.

11 Cukier, K. and V. Schönberger, ‘The rise of big data: how it’s changing the way we think about the world’ *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2013.

including information gathering, and the combination and analysis of large swathes of information particularly carry the promise of improved service delivery, for instance in consular diplomacy. Here, the short-term challenge is to have a good website for preventive use, service automation for travelling citizens by means of mobile apps, and to make use of social networking sites and text messaging services in crisis situations, whilst the scope for collaboration with the savvier private sector is evident. In the wake of the spring 2015 Nepal earthquake, governments used Twitter to communicate with their citizens and Google advertised 'Person Finder', which helps tracking people in the aftermath of natural and humanitarian disasters.

## Government and the 'wired society'

There is a range of profound changes at work in the 'wired' society and it is important to note that underpinning developments predate the digital age.<sup>12</sup> Amongst these is the decline in deference and trust in social and political institutions that have weakened the hierarchical linkages between people and institutions. The empowerment of people through access to information and the ability to express views through new channels has reinforced the trend whereby government mimics business in viewing citizens as consumers. Conversely, commercial enterprises have had to come to terms with an environment in which older assumptions on which public relations and marketing strategies were based no longer accord with demands from society. The development of the Internet through Web 2.0 has both accelerated and is a reflection of these developments. The opening up of the Internet with the ability of individuals to add content represents a shift in power from the few to the many over the key modality of 21<sup>st</sup> century communication.

These social mutations are 'rewiring us', they are producing a world in which role definitions are more fluid.<sup>13</sup> But if digital technology offers the prospect of empowerment, it also poses risks in the form of challenges to privacy. The 'Internet of things', that is the transfer of data and the execution of operations not requiring human-to-human or human-to-computer interaction, and the ability of smartphones to track individual movements and preferences, open up the prospect of an Orwellian world. Reconciling the growing addiction to connectivity and concerns with its consequent erosion of the sphere of the private is one of the major dilemmas of the 'networked society'.

Despite these concerns, the digital age impacts on government in terms of more effective top-down delivery of services. This was the key objective of the early phase of 'e-government', taken to a higher level by Estonia in offering the opportunity to anyone in the world to become an Estonian electronic citizen.<sup>14</sup> National governments and international organisations seek to incorporate digital tools into the toolkit of policy making. In the words of a statement following a meeting of the OECD Network on E-Government in 2014 which adopted a 'policy toolkit' to assist governments develop digital strategies, "the goal is to strengthen public sector strategic agility and improve public policy performance, leveraging the power of innovation to build and maintain trust in government services".<sup>15</sup> However, an OECD policy paper makes the critical observation that few governments are trying to leverage

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12 Kendall, P. 'Is the digital age rewiring us?' *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 March 2013.

13 'Smartphones: planet of the phones' and 'The truly personal computer' *The Economist*, 28 February 2015.

14 Schnurer, E. 'Estonia and the future of the cyberstate', *Foreign Affairs*, 28 January 2015.

15 OECD, 'OECD E-Leaders take next steps to get their governments closer to citizens and businesses.

<http://www.oecd.org/governance/eleaders/2014-key-outcomes.pdf>

social media to involve people in public policy processes or in improving public service delivery.<sup>16</sup> Government institutions, as opposed to the spin doctors of political campaigns, seem somewhat uncertain about the objectives and gains to be made by utilising social media.

Next to 'e-government', the notion of 'e-participation' is framed around two-way, top-down and bottom-up dynamics and the expectation of co-creation of solutions between government and people. In OECD terminology, e-government involves a move from 'citizen-centric approaches' where governments anticipate citizens' needs to 'citizen-driven' approaches whereby people identify their own needs and pursue them in partnership with government. Consequently, digital technologies can reduce political exclusion by allowing new routes for access and influence by offering the opportunity to interest groups to place issues on the policy agenda and/or alter policy decisions.

Social media offer significant participative potential, alongside an easy and possibly meaningless route to 'participation'. What has been termed social networking 'slacktivism' can perhaps best be described as virtual-cum non labour-intensive 'activism-lite'. Signing e-petitions may be comforting but ultimately simply create an illusion of participation in shaping public policy.

## Conclusion

Our argument suggests the importance of the relationship between technological change and the broader societal context in which it occurs – a view underscored by a historical perspective. In this vein the emergence of the telegraph occurred alongside profound social, political and economic changes. Moreover, the example of the telegraph is illustrative in that foreign ministries adjusted their procedures in the light of the changed international environment that it helped to create as well as specific domestic circumstances. Today there is a notable tendency to overdraw the 'newness' of communications technologies.<sup>17</sup> The propensity towards 'hype' in responding to technological change and the predilection for technological determinism are unhelpful in analysing the essence of diplomacy in the digital age.

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16 Mickoleit, A. Social Media Use by Governments: a policy primer to discuss trends, identify policy opportunities and guide decision makers, *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance no 26*.

17 Standage, T. *Writing on the Wall: Social media – the first 2000 years*, London Bloomsbury, 2013.

### 3 Offline and Online Perspectives

If the term 'digital age' presents us with a complex mix of technological, social, economic and political changes, then its popular derivative, 'digital diplomacy' is no less problematic. The easiest course would be to focus on social media, but even here the picture is confused. For many, the role of digital media seems to be equated with the broader public diplomacy function, with diplomats embracing Twitter and Facebook, and their embassies engaging with local audiences in the digital domain. For others, digital media is loosely associated with general developments in world politics and foreign policy. Then there are disagreements as to the intensity of change in diplomatic practice wrought by technological change, not to mention clashes of opinion on their compatibility with diplomatic culture. There is a wide continuum ranging from technophile diplomats who accept the blessings of social media in toto, regardless of the job at hand, to technophobes with an irrational resistance to their use and, in any case, no clue as to where to start.

The more fundamental parallel debate is about diplomatic transformations that precede the advent of digital media, which is drowned out by the buzz about the social media. As suggested in the previous chapter, we have become familiar with 'multistakeholder diplomacy' which recognises a broadening of constituencies that need to be involved in the delivery of successful outcomes. 'Network diplomacy' shares the same basic logic. It looks at the organisational forms, work processes and practices characteristic of diplomatic milieus, and suggests that vertical hierarchical structures based on command and control models are no longer fit for purpose in an environment where 'horizontal' dynamics are increasingly significant. These debates about the 'offline' environment in which diplomacy functions have been going on for some time, and are now interacting with discussions on diplomacy in an 'online' world.

#### Trust and communication

In the international press and other media, much of the debate in 2014 has focused on events such as the dramatic scenario unfolding in Ukraine, the Hong Kong pro-democracy riots and social turbulence in Western societies accompanying the rise of Islamic State. By casting our net wider, we can get a broader perspective on how changing communications patterns cut across the world(s) of diplomacy. Lessons can be drawn from three recent situations in which diplomacy has been challenged by a changing communications environment.

*The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Ebola Crisis.* During 2014, the WHO faced increasing criticism over its handling of the Ebola crisis in West Africa. Much of the criticism related to the speed of its response together with the lack of an effective strategy and focused on the leading health NGO, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). On 3 April, MSF first warned WHO, who responded by saying the numbers affected were still small. A dispute then broke out on social media between MSF and the WHO's spokesperson, who insisted it was under control. In September 2014, the adoption of a digital disease management system (RegPoint) through which medical staff, patients and public could communicate via mobile phones was being promoted by its private sector developer as the only means of combatting the emergency.

*The disappearance of flight MH370.* The disappearance of Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 in March 2014 resulted in intense scrutiny by the world media of the Malaysian Government's response. A lack of deft handling combined with confused and contradictory information undermined the credibility of the government. Each official statement was greeted with skepticism in the press and on social networking sites like Twitter and Sina Weibo, with the Chinese government even questioning the veracity of information from Malaysian officials.

*The US-EU Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).* The negotiations between the EU and the US to create the world's largest free trade area ran into significant opposition over one of its key features, the Investor-state dispute settlement provision (ISDS). This would allow a business enterprise to take legal action against a foreign jurisdiction which it regarded as harming its commercial interests. Closed international tribunals would adjudicate on such disputes which opponents claim would conflict with governments' freedom to pursue policies in domestic domains such as healthcare, education and environmental protection. NGOs such as Public Citizen, a watchdog group, have tracked US multinationals use of ISDS clauses in other trade agreements and have developed a powerful alliance which through skilled use of digital and print media has been successful in generating public opposition to the agreement.

Each of these issues involves diplomacy in its most basic sense – namely the management of change in international relations by means of institutionalized communication. However, each of the three instances demonstrates just how difficult it is to manage communication in a highly fragmented information environment. Central to all these cases is:

*The importance of public trust:* these events highlight the problem that official actors – national governments and international organisations – confront in an environment where public trust is lacking. Confidence and reputation can be manipulated and destroyed through effective campaigns conducted by civil society groups using a range of media formats. The level of trust in the capacity and even truthfulness of the WHO, the Malaysian government, the EU and the US government were thrown into doubt, reducing their capacity to act.

*The problem of appropriate response:* none of the three cases demonstrated a high level of capacity to manage the situation. Given the complexity of the circumstances in the case of the Ebola situation and flight MH370, this is understandable to a degree. In the case of the Malaysian airliner, the failures in communication between Malaysian and Indonesian authorities enhanced public distrust. But even so, both governments demonstrated a clear failure to anticipate the global information campaigns and the multiplier effect of the social media. The case of TTIP is rather different – especially on the EU front. Here, it has been argued that the communications strategy was 'captured' by the Directorate-General (DG) Trade whose professional culture – rooted in client confidentiality and commercial sensitivities – was totally unsuited to dealing with a nimble and sophisticated opposition strategy.

*The hybrid nature of the policy environment:* each set of events demonstrated differing degrees of 'hybridity' in terms of the actors involved and the strategies that the various actors pursued – whether consciously or unconsciously. First, the case of MH370 was a sudden and tragic crisis situation demanding a response from several authorities and jurisdictions. The TTIP experience at the EU level seems to be an instance of a formal negotiating process where a key actor, the EU, failed to deploy an effective communications response through the most appropriate part of the EU policy machine. Second, each case involved a range of actors

both governmental and non-governmental, the roles of which configured a distinctive pattern of communications. Third, whilst it is tempting to regard each situation as an example of the power of social media, the actual pattern of events was one of combined communications flows, including digital media, print media and TV.

Understanding these events requires a perspective broader than that conventionally regarded as diplomacy. Foreign ministries now share the pressures confronting sectoral ministries. This is part of the problem. Diplomacy has become ‘domesticated’ since the realm of the foreign is far harder to define. Moreover, more forms of diplomacy are developing in response to complex policy agendas comprising a mix of environmental threats, global pandemics, cybercrime and the instabilities presented by fragile states. These issues are far less susceptible to rational policy processes of problem definition, analysis and solution – often because there is no clear and agreed definition of the problem.

In our 2012 report *Futures for Diplomacy*, we set out what we termed an ‘integrative diplomacy’ framework for understanding this changing environment. Many of the arguments developed there – such as the growth of complex communication patterns, the importance of networks and the challenges to hierarchical forms and processes – puts in a broader context points underpinning much of the digital diplomacy debate. Our aim then and now is to integrate the *online* and the *offline* in order to draw a more balanced picture of where diplomacy stands. Secretary of State John Kerry made the point neatly in the State Department blog DipNote:

Everybody sees change now. With social media, when you say something to one person, a thousand people hear it. So of course there’s no such thing anymore as effective diplomacy that doesn’t put a sophisticated use of technology at the center of all we’re doing to help advance our foreign policy objectives, bridge gaps between people across the globe, and engage with people around the world and right here at home. *The term digital diplomacy is redundant – it’s just diplomacy, period.*<sup>18</sup>

This observation echoes the debate on public diplomacy and the argument that ‘PD’ has now been ‘mainstreamed’ into diplomatic practice, and that treating it as a separate category may be reductionist – simplifying a complex picture.

## Digital diplomacy categories

We are confronted with varying possibilities regarding the position of diplomacy in the digital age: gradual change and adaptation within the existing frameworks and principles versus a fundamental break with accepted patterns of behaviour, norms and rules so that diplomacy starts to look fundamentally different. The term ‘digital diplomacy’ covers a multitude of meanings. Table 1 seeks to set these out whilst recognising that the categories overlap and that the implications for diplomacy are by no means solely related to innovations in communications technologies.

The first – and broadest – category relates to the *changing foreign policy environment*. Here, a key theme is the growing speed of events (how fast they develop) together with

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18 Kerry, J. ‘Digital Diplomacy: adapting our diplomatic engagement’, DipNote, 6 May 2013. <https://blogs.state.gov/stories/2013/05/06/digital-diplomacy-adapting-our-diplomatic-engagement> (Emphasis added).

their velocity (speed *and* direction) and the implication that these have for policy makers. These are not unfamiliar ideas since they are part of the established globalization argument. However, they are reinforced by a much more fragmented flow of communications as mobile technologies empower individuals and groups to shape rapidly unfolding events. The capacity of governments to deploy digital resources is a critical component of the digital environment. Equally important is the capacity of governments to control them – as through state intervention in access to and the use of the Internet and social media. Alongside these factors are the changing character of the policy agenda and the rising importance of social power – the capacity to frame agendas through non-hierarchical modes of policymaking – which is reinforced by the dynamics of the digital age.

Taken together, these perspectives on digital diplomacy suggest diminishing control over events and agendas, and the need for developing new skills and structures and adapting those already in use. This once again echoes experiences with public diplomacy, particularly in the western world. Hence the recognition that MFAs and individual diplomats need to develop networking approaches, adapt their work processes to the changing playing field, and refine ‘stakeholder’ strategies to accommodate the claims of a broader range of participants. Crucially, networks thrive on the value added of ideas rather than authority, explaining the growing importance of the capacity to influence the shaping of policy agendas in critical areas of external relations, such as health, financial structures, the environment, human rights and other issues on the new security agenda. This highlights the significance of ‘knowledge leadership’, which is increasingly bound up with digital resources. New ideas are typically launched in the social media and modern networking takes advantage of the multiplier effect of influential netizens and actors whose external communication is centred on the internet.

Related to changing foreign policy agendas, a second facet of the digital diplomacy environment, largely outside the scope of our analysis, focuses on *cyber agendas*. Rather than concerned with how digitalization impacts on the performance of diplomacy, the focus is on what diplomacy is about. The range of issues subsumed under this heading includes general issues of cyber governance, Internet freedom, and cyber warfare and cyber security. Apart from questions of negotiating formats, for foreign ministries questions of threats to the security of diplomatic structures and processes arise.

A third dimension of the digital diplomacy debate (termed in the US State Department ‘e-diplomacy’) is the use of the Internet and related digital technologies for *knowledge management*. As with government more generally, this recognises the importance of managing data efficiently but has a particular resonance in diplomatic networks and MFA policy planning staffs because of the promise of managing scarce resources more effectively. During the 1990s, the term ‘virtual diplomacy’ came into common usage reflecting the growing demands placed on diplomatic services in the post-Cold War environment. Part of this changed environment (to be followed by the resource constraints created by the global economic crisis after 2007) strengthened the quest for more cost-effective modes of diplomatic representation and experimentation with alternatives to the traditional embassy. One key technological aspect of these changes was the development of secure e-mail. This not only strengthened the arguments of those questioning the age-old balance between headquarters and diplomatic posts – as two parts of the integral MFA network – it also began to challenge traditional hierarchical work procedures within the organization as a whole.

The fourth facet of the digitalization debate, again rooted in broader debates about the impact on government of digitalization, relates to the usage of digital technologies to *improve the service delivery, enhance the key functions of sectors of the public service, and reinforce participation in the shaping of policy*. On one side, the focus here is on improving access to government and enhancing participation, reflecting earlier debates on the ‘democratisation’ of diplomacy. Here we confront a key debate in the recent evolution of public diplomacy and the extent to which this can live up to expectations of two-way communication suggesting an ‘opening up’ of the foreign policy processes.

On another level, the issue is one of utilising new modes of communication to manage networks and to perform service functions more effectively, as in consular and crisis management. Central to these elements of digital diplomacy is the notion of developing ‘responsive’ or ‘web 2.0’ diplomacy. This recognises the need to move beyond top-down or one-way information distribution models (as represented by static websites and, in public diplomacy, practices that are effectively little more than ‘Infopolitik’) to interactive modes of communication.

These four interpretations of digital diplomacy are related features of an increasingly complex policy milieu that transcends domestic and international policy environments. Taken together they constitute patterns of ‘digital disruption’.

## Digital disruption and diplomacy

As a paper from Deloitte Australia suggests, ‘digital disruption’ is a neutral term covering positive and negative impacts of digitalization on organisations – both in the private and public sectors.<sup>19</sup> How this will play out in a given context varies, depending on the nature of the enterprise or government and can be measured by the impact of digital technologies – the ‘bang’ – and the length of time before an industry or organisation is affected – the length of the ‘fuse’.

How does this apply to the diplomatic arena?<sup>20</sup> As we can see from table 3.1, diplomatic institutions face significant challenges from a changing policy environment partly determined by digital innovations. At the same time, the intensity of change (the ‘bang’) is likely to be lower than that experienced by government departments and agencies with sensitive domestic agendas. Diplomacy – with the obvious exception of consular functions – is less involved in service provision. Similarly the scope or ‘fuse length’ of digitalization will be more variable in foreign policy management with parts of the diplomatic machinery, such as those most closely involved with public diplomacy, affected more rapidly and extensively than others.

We can distinguish between two ends of a spectrum of change. At one end of the spectrum there will be patterns of adaptation reflected in table 3.1. Here, the structures and processes of diplomacy respond to digital disruption in a relatively straightforward way, by utilising its

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19 Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, *Digital Disruption: short fuse, big bang?* Sydney, 2012. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/au/Documents/Building%20Lucky%20Country/deloitte-au-consulting-digital-disruption-whitepaper-0912.pdf>

20 Owen, T. *Disruptive Power: the Crisis of the State in the Digital Age*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

resources and tailoring patterns of activity to demands that are enhanced by digitalization. We see this for the fields of representation and consular functions.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are much more profound changes to fundamental norms and rules which challenge accepted notions of what diplomacy is – or should be. As we have seen, these comprise *entrenched notions of hierarchy* rooted in the evolution of state-based diplomacy over several centuries. A second norm is the *specialness of foreign policy as a realm of one-way, top down communication*. A third norm is the place of *secrecy or confidentiality* in diplomatic process. At most levels of diplomatic activity, whether in national or international forums, there is a counter claim to that of confidentiality. Networked diplomacy requires engagement with broader constituencies, increasingly transparent relationships, and more openness when it comes to sharing information in the interests of collaborative policy-making and joint problem-solving. This ‘opening up of diplomacy’ underscores the key problem of balancing the requirements of confidentiality in negotiations with the growing demands for transparency. One response to this tension is to argue that new technologies such as social media do not replace conventional forms of diplomacy, as a paper from the Russian International Affairs Council argues:

...digital diplomacy is mainly applicative in nature and is particularly useful in working with foreign audiences in matters of relaying the official position and building up the image of the state. *It is important to understand that it is unlikely to ever replace diplomacy in its conventional sense.* Closed talks will remain closed. However digital diplomacy is capable of explaining why a certain decision was made, what results it will give, how it will influence the foreign policy process, i.e. of *opening public access to the results of conventional diplomacy*.<sup>21</sup>

## Diplomats’ comments on digital diplomacy

How do practitioners see the impact of digitalization on their work, or better: what do they say about this in public? We have seen the view reflected in the comment of John Kerry that employing digital technologies is becoming mainstreamed into diplomatic practice. But that still leaves the question of how digital technologies are being used, with what kinds of policy objectives and how they relate to fundamental precepts of diplomacy identified earlier. A favourite theme is that social media is somehow *‘demystifying’ diplomacy and enhancing access to diplomatic process*. Examples regularly cited are social campaigns using Twitter hashtags and viral videos such as the ‘bring back our girls’ campaign calling for the release of 270 Nigerian schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram.

Another key theme is the *use of digital technologies to ‘amplify messages’*. As one example, Michael Grant, Canadian deputy permanent representative at the UN, notes the significance of social media for finding and spreading information, replicating and amplifying messages such as diplomats’ speeches and public appearances: “Is social media absolutely 100 per cent required? No it isn’t. But I think you can do your job better by engaging with social media... Is it 100 per cent part of diplomacy? Yes it is.”<sup>22</sup> A recurrent theme is that social media is an essential weapon in the developing diplomatic armoury through message projection

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21 Permyakova, L. Digital diplomacy: areas of work, risks and tools’, Russian International Affairs Council, 28 September 2012. <[http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id\\_4=864#top](http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id_4=864#top)> (Emphasis added).

22 ‘Twiplomacy at the UN’, *Nepali Times*, 7 February 2015.

and amplification. National diplomats make the point regularly but often surround it with cautionary notes mostly heard during in-house discussions about the use of the social media in diplomacy. Many practitioners are skeptical about the hyperactive sending behavior of colleagues who are sometimes portrayed as role models of the diplomat in the digital age.

As can be seen in the comments of two ambassadors cited in Box 3.1, the possibilities of extended dialogues with global communities can add to the diplomatic toolbox. But Ambassador Bekink makes the point that using digital tools effectively demands a strategy that relates a specific communications modality to clear objectives. Ambassador Volker in similar vein cautions against regarding the use of new technologies as simply 'tweeting feel-good photos'. The potential impact of digital forms of communication when attuned to clear objectives is highlighted by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Here, a spokesperson for the organization argues that social media has radically changed the character of its campaigns: "when a crisis or disaster happens, people want to do something. It's hard to give them an outlet to do anything, especially in a war zone, but social media gives people the opportunity to participate in fundraising or awareness".<sup>23</sup> But the dangers of unreflective usage of social media have been identified by some diplomats in the UN where Security Council proceedings have been described as generating 'digital wars' and 'hashtag battles'.

### Box 3.1

- Digital behavior, trends, and opportunities can raise awareness of particular issues in a country. This extends well beyond posting a few tweets, as cautioned by the Netherlands Ambassador to the USA, Rudolf Bekink: "the digital arena opens new possibilities, from one-on-one conversations to dialogues with communities." Traditional diplomacy is still relevant, he says, "but digital diplomacy adds enormously to the capabilities of every diplomat." Bekink points out that "one challenge in this field is choosing the appropriate technological platform that allows you to reach your target audience. We should not be engaging in a one-size-fits-all strategy, but customizing digital diplomacy to our specific needs."
- **Ambassador Kurt Volker**, former U.S. Ambassador to NATO and Executive Director of the McCain Institute for International Leadership at Arizona State University, says that "in every other aspect of our lives, we are using technology to gain access to more information, speed up our activities, and extend our reach and effectiveness." Diplomacy, he says, should take note. "Ambassadors and diplomats need to think of technology not merely as tweeting feel-good photos, but as an essential tool for accomplishing their core mission in a technology-driven era." The challenge will be to deepen and enrich such work, making full use of emerging tools to support those in the global diplomatic arena.
- **From: L. DeLisa Coleman, 'Diplomacy must embrace digiculture', *Diplomatic Courier* 13 June 2014.**

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23 This, of course, raises the issue of meaningful participation in international events and the likelihood that it has little meaning – an example of online pseudo-participation referred to as 'slacktivism' and 'clicktivism'. 'Twiplomacy at the UN', *Nepali Times*, 7 February 2015.

## Conclusion

Understanding the nature and implications of digital diplomacy is clouded by the varying usages that the term currently embraces. Whilst no single perspective is 'right' or 'wrong', it is important to appreciate the meanings and implications that each conveys. Having said that, it is hard to predict how patterns of 'digital disruption' with their balance of constraints and opportunities are likely to play out. The picture is confused by the broader 'offline' evolutionary trends in all levels of diplomatic practice, and as the growing 'hybridity' of media is matched by a growing 'hybridity' of diplomacy in the digital era. More varied forms of diplomacy develop to deal with the growing range of global, regional and local challenges.

**Table 3.1 Perspectives on Digital Diplomacy**

	Focus and forms	Implications for diplomacy
Changing foreign policy environment	Sees the advent of digital media as altering the foreign policy environment. Enhanced velocity of events; complex flows of communications. Role and capacity of non-state actors reinforced by new communications technologies. Changing power configurations. Enhanced significance of social power and ability to shape agendas through non-hierarchical means of policy-making.	Diminishing control over information flows. Implies the need for new skills and structures symbolised in new terminologies such as 'twiplomacy'. Need to develop 'stakeholder' strategies and to review the resources needed to effect policy outcomes. Significance of 'knowledge leadership' in achieving policy objectives.
Knowledge and resource management	The implications of managing and analysing growing information flows. Utilising the Internet and other digital technologies to manage diplomacy in a more resource-efficient fashion.	Knowledge management in an era of vast and increasing flows of data (sometimes equated with 'e-diplomacy') Identification of 'virtual diplomacy' in 1990s focuses on possibilities of ICT in resource savings through new modes of representation (e.g. 'laptop diplomacy')
Cyber policy agendas	The digital revolution as a set of policy agendas focusing on such issues as Internet freedom, cyber security and cyber warfare.	At the global level, the challenges posed in negotiating modes of cyber governance. Security threats to diplomatic structures and processes.
E-governance and e-participation Changing diplomatic structures, functions and needs	Governments' responses to digital technology in terms of delivering services and encouraging broader participation The implications of digitalization for the organisation and delivery of diplomacy, notably in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• public diplomacy.</li> <li>• Consular and crisis management.</li> <li>• Constructing and managing networks</li> </ul> Enhancing broader patterns of participation in foreign policy.	Digital technologies offer new tools to diplomatic actors for achieving policy objectives and performing services. Developing responsive 'web 2.0 diplomacy'. New channels for communication in public diplomacy and possibilities for reputation management. Delivering consular services and managing crises through use of digital technologies. Operational challenges in reconciling demands of openness and confidentiality. Reconciling hierarchical and networked modes of operation. Challenges to accepted norms, rules and roles in diplomacy.

## 4 The Changing DNA of Diplomacy

There are two interconnected perspectives to the broader context of diplomatic change and adaptation in the digital diplomacy debate: diplomatic *processes*, geared towards the functions of diplomacy, and diplomatic *structures*, focusing on the institutions of diplomacy such as foreign ministries. Debates about diplomacy have regularly muddled arguments about the role and importance of the key functions of diplomacy with arguments about specific institutions. As we have seen, interpretations of the *consequences* of change in information and communication technologies tend to focus on the specific features of technology. They place less emphasis on the context in which they develop. 'Digital diplomacy' therefore becomes a shorthand term for developments conditioning and conditioned by the emergence of digital modes of communication.

### Diplomatic processes in the digital age

In the diplomatic arena all things 'online' blend with the 'offline': ICT trends impact on pre-existing, hybrid modes of diplomacy. In this connection, the use of the Web 2.0 metaphor crops up regularly in the literature. Luk Van Langenhove employs it to describe the transformation from 'closed' to 'open' multilateralism, including a wider range of stakeholders in diverse networks required to deal with increasingly multifaceted policy agendas.<sup>24</sup> In national governments, we discern a trend towards more systematic reflection on 'networked diplomacy', which has become a growing preoccupation among Asian governments – including China, South Korea and Japan – as much as in the West. Referring to the 'offline' context to the impact of 'online' technologies, Fergus Hanson succinctly sums up the key focus of what he terms 'eDiplomacy': "the use of the Internet and new Information and Communications Technologies to help carry out diplomatic objectives".<sup>25</sup> As he notes in his 2012 study of digital diplomacy in the US State Department:

State has already begun conceptual work on the idea of "networked diplomacy" – that is, moving beyond the traditional siloed approach to information gathering in capitals, where every embassy closely guards all its information, to a networked approach where information is easily shared between like-minded governments.<sup>26</sup>

'Networked diplomacy' can here be identified as the underlying theme – at the interface of hybrid diplomacy and the impact of ICT trends – and marked by a growing range of non-state players, linked policy agendas and a greater space for citizen involvement. The current emphasis on networks, and hence the acceleration of 'horizontal' relationship dynamics, does not gel with the traditional bureaucratic culture and corresponding work processes of hierarchical and institutionalized diplomatic environments. Networked diplomacy as a systematic activity rather than diplomats' second nature can, in a way, be seen as the

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24 Van Langenhove, L. 'The transformation of multilateralism: mode1.0 to mode 2.0', *Global Policy* 1(3) October 2010.

25 Hanson, F., *Baked in and Wired: eDiplomacy@State*, Foreign Policy Paper Series no 30, Washington D.C., Brookings Institution, 25 October 2012: p.2.

26 Hanson, p. 5.

basis of 21<sup>st</sup> century diplomatic practice. It implies a conceptual upgrade to new functions, shifting roles and changing relationships with external stakeholders.

The mix of hybrid diplomacy and digital trends helps us to understand and draw the conceptual outline of a new 21<sup>st</sup> century environment in which networking as an activity is becoming the foundation of diplomatic practice. The requirements of greater transparency and varying expectations of different types of diplomatic actors are two of the major factors that result in more complex diplomacy. Relationships with new sets of stakeholders are important in expanded policy environments where the power of ideas is greater than in the past and in which procedures, the informal rules of engagement, are no longer dictated by government. The great mistake that diplomats today can make – and do make – is to imply that the institutions that they represent are at the heart of ‘their’ networks. In reality, and accelerated by the impact of digitalization, diffuse diplomatic networks that put a premium on knowledge and expertise are substituting the more rigid state-centred networks of diplomacy that flourished during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The value added and ‘output legitimacy’ of stakeholders within networks, rather than their authority determined by their status, is what matters.

Diplomats still acting and speaking like exponents of a traditional diplomatic world will meet progressive resistance. And as far as agents from government try to copy-paste hierarchical behaviour from their own professional base to multi-stakeholder networks, they will undermine their own legitimacy. Changing diplomatic structures and processes affect the requirements for successful diplomatic behaviour. In the combined ‘offline’ and ‘online’ diplomatic networks, information flows more horizontally and is shared in constantly changing milieus – like the subterranean root structures of nettle or ginger plants. Such modern networks are of course inherently less stable than the familiar world of states and international organizations. Furthermore, governmental acceptance that internal norms and routines cannot be imposed on their external environment is a necessary condition for their effective functioning.

Discussions of digital diplomacy are divided between on the one hand analyses of the changing character of diplomacy and the ways in which the use of, for example, social media can impact on its processes. On the other hand, trying to capture change in neologisms such as ‘twiplomacy’, generally offers little reflection on how the forms of diplomacy might be modified by new communications technologies. Self-help books claiming to offer signposts to developing ‘digital diplomacy’ are only useful as generic guides to social media dressed up with public relations principles.<sup>27</sup> In order to take our discussion forward, what are the key questions focusing on the character of diplomacy as an activity?

*Does the rise of a more participative, interactive diplomatic environment transform our understanding of the very essence of diplomacy?* Here it is worth repeating that the term ‘diplomacy’ has evolved with the growing number of core diplomatic functions and roles, and that it embraces quite diverse activities. Much contemporary ‘diplomacy’, for example, is service oriented – in the form of consular services and crisis management requiring the deployment of skills and resources that span domestic and international environments.

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27 A recent example is Deruda, A. *The Digital Diplomacy Handbook: how to use social media to engage with global audiences*, (no publisher), 2014. More informed analyses with experience of diplomacy are Hanson (see above) and Sandre, A. *Twitter for Diplomats*, Geneva, DiploFoundation 2013.

*How will negotiation respond to the rise of digitalization, apart from accelerated policy analysis and decision-making facilitated by, for instance, email, teleconferencing and automated analysis of 'big data'? Will the assumption that online, face-to-face communication is essential prove to be weakening?* This question and the issue of the balance between 'online' and 'offline' are more subtle ones than might be assumed at first glance. Aside from such considerations regarding negotiation – traditionally seen as the hard core of diplomacy – it deserves mentioning that many activities by diplomats have little to do with face-to-face communication in the shape of negotiation, as practitioners know and diplomatic memoirs illustrate.

*Will digital technologies remain a specialist aspect of diplomacy or will they be mainstreamed into diplomatic processes?* As with earlier technologies, digital forms of communication will go through phases of scepticism and hype, gradual acceptance and incorporation into diplomatic life. In the process, some diplomats will find their egos inflated. Social media allow them to step outside the twilight world imposed by norms of diplomatic behaviour and become feted 'twiplomats'. The more prosaic reality is however that diplomats, like other people, are still finding their feet in the social media, and a number of MFAs have therefore started offering social media training courses.

Our observations suggest that there is still a great deal of reluctance regarding the use of social media among practitioners. Many diplomats, for example, appear to use Twitter predominantly for (very useful) purposes of information gathering. All this suggests that the mainstreaming of social media, let alone digital technologies in a more general sense, into diplomatic processes is going to be a long-term project. To be fair, the public diplomacy experience of the past 15 years or so directly addresses the issue of 'mainstreaming'. From being a new niche area of diplomacy, Western governments now commonly see public diplomacy as an integral component of all facets of diplomatic activity, even though upgrading MFA and embassy practices remains an ongoing challenge.

*Will some traditional aspects of diplomacy become obsolete because of the digital revolution and will others become more salient?* This is a question which underpins the long evolution of what Harold Nicolson called 'diplomatic method'. Experience suggests that technologies rarely create new diplomatic functions but rather influence the ways in which those functions are performed. Different facets of diplomacy have become significant or seemingly dominant as a consequence of international developments, domestic political pressures and, not least, fashion. Take commercial diplomacy as an example. In many European countries in the wake of the 2007-8 global financial crisis commercial diplomacy was resurrected as a dominant goal of national diplomacy.

*Does the digital revolution require a fundamental re-evaluation of the rules and practices of a state based diplomatic system?* Does this demand a reappraisal of, for example, outdated principles of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations? Here we can see that change is afoot in several directions. In recent years precepts regarding non-interference in the domestic affairs of host countries have repeatedly rubbed up against public diplomacy strategies. In some bilateral relationships it seemed that the principle of non-interference became replaced by the 'duty to interfere'. Equally, there are recent developments pointing to the continued relevance of 'Vienna' principles. Experiences on the cyber diplomacy agenda – especially with China and Russia – point to the likelihood that digitalization, in the form of cyber-security and Internet freedom, will lead to growing disputes between geopolitical rivals – as much as enhancing collaboration between like-minded states.

## Foreign policy arenas and ICT

It is essential to avoid generalisations about the policy environments we are examining. Not only is this important analytically but also in a practical sense so as to resist 'one size fits all' digital strategies. We need to differentiate between the often-intricate web of issues underlying negotiations (*diplomatic domains*) and the character of the processes through which diplomatic communication occurs in specific arenas (*diplomatic sites*). Several patterns of diplomatic interaction co-exist. These range from encounters marked by high levels of official input from national policy communities and/or intergovernmental organizations, through 'shared' diplomatic arenas reflected in 'multilayered' and 'private diplomacy' categories, to situations where government input is low.

Different models for diplomacy coalesce around different policy agendas involving varying actors and arenas – and indeed distinct communications requirements. The latter point can be illustrated by contrasting the employment of social media in human rights campaigns with their much more problematic use on traditional security issues. Furthermore, the shift towards 'networked governance' obviously puts a premium on 'networked diplomacy'. This requires the ability to develop holistic strategies, construct and manage diverse diplomatic spaces; persuade others outside one's own organization to work towards the accomplishment of shared goals, and to maximize knowledge capacity in producing relevant policy concepts, proposals and data capable of generating consensus for action. Each of these suggests a role for ICT tailored to the specific requirements of a given issue or area.

It is equally relevant to be clear about what diplomacy is for. Looking at earlier discussions on the effects of globalization, generalizations evolved from initial sweeping claims to more cautious approaches which disaggregated the basic functions of diplomacy, and sought to evaluate the impact of specific aspects of globalisation on them. We need to follow the same path with digital diplomacy. Not only is this important in allowing us to understand the rewards and risks of digitalization but, as Hanson makes clear in the case of the State Department, it has the added benefit of explaining the differential impact of ICT on the component parts of an MFA. Assembling the toolkit of digital resources is one thing: knowing how and where to employ them is quite another. Questions surrounding the use of social media, their purposes and even the desirability of their visible use on personal accounts, for example, vary greatly between different policy areas. Whilst the average consular officer in times of crisis probably prefers to work without being personally exposed to distressed citizens, diplomats campaigning for development goals have much less of a problem with being individually visible in public campaigns and engaging with the public.

## Public diplomacy

Public diplomacy is the area most often singled out for attention in the digital debate. Social networking sites have created new dynamics and opened up a plethora of previously unimaginable opportunities for public diplomacy. It is necessary, however, to always bear the wider picture in mind: the use of websites and social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and other online platforms for public diplomacy is just the tip of the larger digital iceberg. Marcus Holmes rightly argues that the danger of treating the digital agenda as one synonymous with public diplomacy is that it narrows the discussion in such a way as

to downplay the scope of diplomatic activity.<sup>28</sup> It is easy to agree with this point but, looking at it in reverse, public diplomacy principles and strategies are woven into most aspects of diplomatic activity.

Digital technologies have reinforced an established theme in public diplomacy discourses over the last decade or so: namely, the ‘talking’ versus ‘listening’ debate frequently presented as ‘public diplomacy 1.0’ versus ‘public diplomacy 2.0’. The distinction is between models of top-down ‘broadcast’ public diplomacy models and dialogue-based models in which there is exchange of information and two-way communication between publics and government representatives. As can be seen in Box 4.1, Zaharna identifies these developments in terms of three phases, the third – albeit not supplanting the previous two – being based on the ‘relational paradigm’ involving relationship building and networking.

**Box 4.1**  
**Digital media and the evolution of public diplomacy**

Social media has effectively rendered this one-way quest for information dominance and control obsolete. That ushered in a new phase of public diplomacy based on the relational imperative.... Governments realized that publics were no longer content to be the target audience, or “target practice,” for public diplomacy messages. Social media had greatly expanded the array of media and information choices...

...Proliferation of social media soon spawned a third phase of public diplomacy in which governments operated on the understanding that publics were not content with being merely participants in government-initiated and controlled communication. Thanks to digital media’s low costs and high capabilities, publics quickly seized the mantle of being content producers. They now had the ability to augment their voice and initiate a new communication dynamic in the public arena. Governments, not wanting to lose relevancy, in turn, quickly lauded the publics, movements, and initiatives they favored. This phase saw the increasingly organized participation of civil society organizations and the rise of “relationship building,” “mutuality,” “partnerships,” and “social networks” in the lexicon of public diplomacy.

...Effective public diplomacy now rested on a government’s ability to cultivate relations with publics in order to promote policy agendas and create policy change. The operative words in this phase are publics, movements, and initiatives that a government favored. The challenge for diplomacy is that digital media remained a medium, and policy itself remained the message. And in the policy battles, publics are using digital media to go for the political jugular.

**Extracts from R.S Zaharna, ‘From Pinstripes to Tweets’, Cairo Review of Global Affairs, 25 January 2015.**

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28 Holmes, M. ‘What is e-Diplomacy?’ Paper presented at 7<sup>th</sup> European Consortium for Political Research General Conference, Bordeaux, 2013.

Expanded digital communication resources create new opportunities and challenges for governments and other international actors. On the positive side, there is value in being able to reach vast audiences without the interposition of mass media. Added to this is the advantage of being able to segment audiences and direct messages more precisely. In listening mode, digital diplomacy offers the prospect utilising 'big data' resources in developing more effective policy.

The reverse side of the digital coin is that *others* are at least as skilled – usually more so – in utilising digital platforms such as social media. If one problem for governments is gaining a voice in a growing welter of information flows, another concerns lies in the loss of control. The implicit promise of a considerable degree of governmental control over the projection and perception of its image was of course never delivered by consultants in reputation and brand management, and social media are now driving home the message that such control is a delusion. But such limitations do in fact predate the 'digital age': big international NGOs such as Greenpeace were adept at reputation manipulation long before social media endowed it with enhanced possibilities. Once the digital genie was out the bottle, the problems confronting governments developed apace.

This is one facet of the rising significance of social power.<sup>29</sup> Establishing and controlling narratives has long been a central function of diplomacy. Digital modes of communication provide a new dimension and challenge to 'framing' or the presentation of issues in communicative text. As the comments from the NATO Deputy Secretary General at the Public Diplomacy Forum in February 2015 illustrate (see Box 4.2), framing the narrative in the Ukraine conflict has become of paramount importance.

#### **Box 4.2**

#### **Meeting the Strategic Communications Challenge**

#### **Remarks by NATO Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Alexander Vershbow at the Public Diplomacy Forum 2015**



**NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION**

But the new threats we face have a significant new dimension. Whether we look to the East or the South, they include sophisticated propaganda and disinformation. Rarely have we had to deal with such well-financed, well-orchestrated, slick and unrelenting information and media campaigns.

Russia devotes an estimated 100 million Euros a year to media operations. According to some accounts, it employs no fewer than 12 advertising agencies. It has established new state-controlled media, such as Russia Today and the new news agency Sputnik, available in Europe, North America and around the world. These outlets broadcast in English, French, German and other NATO languages.

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29 Van Ham, P. *Social Power in International Relations*, London, Routledge, 2010.

And the message? That it is not Russia that is responsible for the violence in Ukraine, but the Ukrainian government and its western backers. That it's not Russia which has sent personnel, tanks, anti-aircraft missiles and weapons illegally into Eastern Ukraine, but that the Ukrainian army is some sort of mysterious "NATO legion". Although our measures are defensive and fully transparent, Russia describes them as an unprovoked and unjustified push to station NATO forces and infrastructure on Russia's borders.

we must continue to rebut Russian propaganda: not by engaging in tit-for-tat, but by *deconstructing propaganda, debunking Moscow's false historical narrative, by exposing the reality of Russia's actions, and by restating the international rules it is breaking. We must also continue to tell a compelling story about who we are, what we do, and why we do it. (Emphasis added)*

As Ilan Manor has argued, in the age of social media the ability of governments to frame agendas and the flow of events is challenged by changing realities in flows of communications. Older assumptions that framing develops in a hierarchical form – 'cascading' from government to publics and with the traditional media assuming a key mediating role – are challenged by the fact that social media exposes publics to a diversity of 'frames'. Even at the governmental level, people can follow rival foreign ministries each offering their own narrative, whilst local embassies can compete with host governments, tailoring messages to specific groups challenging the framing of events given by the host government. For example, at the time of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's controversial address to both US Houses of Congress in the spring of 2015, the Israeli Embassy in Washington DC was able to frame its take on events by using social networking sites like Twitter, where its number of followers amounted to 80,000+.

With text and visuals from all sorts of news organizations – ranging from bloggers to powerful media conglomerates – the arena in which issues are being framed has become much more complex. Their selection of what constitutes the news and their take on 'events' can be accessed cheaply and via multiple channels. At the same time the growth of social networking sites helps to create 'new gatekeepers' to rival the traditional role of the media. Private bloggers and social media leaders can attract mass audiences and so become influential interpreters of reality.<sup>30</sup> How are diplomats responding to these challenges? Manor's conclusion is that on the whole, MFAs adhere to the older patterns of public diplomacy, using social media, for example, to broadcast messages rather than engaging in dialogue with an 'audience'.<sup>31</sup>

MFA activity in the social media is still fraught with questions, begging for more strategic thinking and managerial direction within foreign ministries. Diplomats are likely to experience tensions between traditional diplomatic norms and the requirements of operating in an

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30 Manor, I. 'In light of Digital Diplomacy – are we in need of new communication models?' *Exploring Digital Diplomacy*, 17 February 2015.

31 Manor, I. 'Between Digital Diplomacy and Diplomacy 2.0', *Public Diplomat* website, 3 February 2015. See also: Manor, I., R. Kampf and E. Segev, 'Digital Diplomacy 2.0? A Cross-National Comparison of Public Engagement in Facebook and Twitter', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 10/4 (2015), forthcoming.

increasingly digitalized environment redefining their roles. Notions about the sharing of information aligned with the principles underpinning digital networking, for instance, run against the diplomatic wisdom that information is power. This is pointing to the need to adapt the conventional diplomatic wisdom to changing norms. As far as it is true that diplomats' behaviour in the social media is still largely characterized by old-style public diplomacy practices, this calls for social media strategies at lower levels within the organization and an upgrading of 'analogue' routines.

## Managing knowledge

Part of the broader sweep of the 'digital age', as noted in Chapter 2s, is the exponential growth of the 'big data' phenomenon. Historically, a key function of diplomacy has been the generation, management and utilisation of knowledge. As we have seen, the changing character of the international policy agenda has assigned growing importance to ideas and their insertion into the global agenda. In the broader setting of networked diplomacy, 'thought leadership' depends on access to and utilisation of knowledge in establishing and defining agendas and framing the discourses that develop around them. But if knowledge is (potential) power then it poses a number of problems, including efficiency issues and legitimacy aspects of knowledge management. These concerns have long standing in the practice of diplomacy and a history in the longer-term evolution of ICT before digitalization arrived on the scene.

What kinds of information are needed and how can these best be generated? This question was traditionally fashioned around the need for traditional structures of intelligence gathering through diplomatic missions' reporting to the MFA. Arguments concerning the so-called 'CNN effect' were predicated on the belief that these forms of diplomatic reporting were now redundant. In reality, rather than supplanting diplomatic intelligence gathering, the mass media changed its objectives and forms.<sup>32</sup> There was and remains a continuing role for deep and focused analysis on the ground rather than generalized information transmission. The rise of digitalization has added to the complexities of this picture. Social media have enhanced resources for policy management and, at the same time, created an increasingly dense and fragmented information environment which has to be 'managed'. This offers diplomats added resources – as in the public diplomacy sphere. Yet, it also strengthens the hand of others now able to gain an effective voice in the global arena.

Digitalization has also impacted on the legitimacy aspects of diplomatic knowledge management processes. This takes us to a key question confronting the contemporary diplomat: if transparency is now a key principle underscored by demands for enhanced participation, how does this relate to the principle of confidentiality which has been central to the practice of much diplomatic activity? The 2011 WikiLeaks episode did not offer any definitive answer to the conundrum of the limits of the domain of the confidential in an era where the demands for openness frequently trump other considerations. The emergence of twiplomacy, i.e. the use of Twitter and other social media platforms by political leaders, seems likely to confuse the picture even more as the roles of diplomats and politicians become even less distinct.

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32 Camilleri, V. 'Diplomatic reporting in the Internet era', paper delivered to the conference on Diplomatic Reporting in the Internet Era' 9 February 2011. Geneva, DiploFoundation eDiplomacy Papers, <<http://www.diplomacy.edu/resources/general/diplomatic-reporting-internet-era>>

A management concern that will be touched upon briefly in our discussion is that digitalization presents problems related to the administration of knowledge to public and private sector organisations. Noting that this was the first digital challenge in the State Department, Hanson identifies the key issues as: locating knowledge resources within the organisation; identifying centres of excellence; promoting knowledge transfer and reducing knowledge wastage through movement of personnel; and maximizing resources by alerting managers to waste and duplication. In the case of the State Department, the Office of eDiplomacy is one of the key units working on knowledge management through a range of platforms and programmes.<sup>33</sup>

## Policy management and negotiation

The digital revolution has been accompanied by fundamental changes in international negotiation. Alongside traditional agendas and procedures, negotiation also embraces knowledge construction and framing discourses on key events. In many situations it has become a process in which the objective is to define a problem and identify ways through which it can be managed, rather than rational convergence of negotiators towards a solution as in classical round-the-table talks. The wider and indeed public context in which international talks take place has become more prominent, thus making prenegotiations or what Harold Saunders termed ‘circum-negotiations’ more important.<sup>34</sup> Whilst digital technologies have not created these instances of diplomatic transformation, they are now key elements in the ways in which they evolve and, crucially, they have created more opportunities for outside influences on state-to-state talks.

What is the right mix between ‘online’ and ‘offline’ diplomatic activities? Hybridity blurs the distinction between these two forms. Nonetheless, there is a debate to be had as to the utility of, for example, social media in specific diplomatic domains. What are the risks and rewards of their use? In viewing the key function of diplomacy as ‘change management’, Holmes identifies two forms of social media involvement in negotiations: the first is a result of top down ‘exogenous shocks’ – as with major geopolitical/geo-economic crises. The second is associated with bottom-up incremental change – as witnessed in human rights and environmental agendas, for example.<sup>35</sup> The first category is much more likely to involve problems of human relationships and, therefore, of trust. On the one hand, in digital settings access to online resources permitting face-to-face interaction is diminished, which makes it harder to ‘read’ interlocutors and measure their sincerity. Digital technologies such as videoconferencing raise questions regarding their impact on trust. Research on digital behavior in negotiations – such as using smart phones for texting during the deliberations – suggests that ‘multi-tasking negotiators’ achieve lower payoffs and are seen as less professional and trustworthy.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, social media are hugely valuable in diplomatic domains where the objectives are complex policy management and incremental change. Digital tools excel in

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33 Hanson, *Baked in and Wired*, pp. 30-31.

34 Saunders, H. ‘Prenegotiation and Circum-negotiation: Arenas of the Peace Process’, in: Chester Crocker, Fen Hampson and Pamela Aall, *Managing Global Chaos*, Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996.

35 Holmes, ‘What is e-Diplomacy?’ pp. 18-20.

36 Krishnan, A., T. Kurtzberg and C. Naquin, ‘The Curse of the Smartphone: Electronic Multitasking in Negotiations’, *Negotiation Journal*, April 2014: pp. 191-208.

the fields of data gathering and analysis and provide the resources for virtual collaboration. Ali Fisher and others have argued that incorporating big data into 'data-driven diplomacy' can be advantageous.<sup>37</sup> Fisher sees the future as one for fruitful collaboration between diplomats and data science.

The potential of data science is to draw large data sets into the study and practice of diplomacy, and allow diplomats and scholars to become comfortable engaging with and analyzing increasingly large and unstructured data... However, the use of data science must maintain a focus on issues meaningful for diplomacy – and provide insights relevant to diplomacy. The emphasis must be on the diplomatic rather than the data challenges.<sup>38</sup>

To illustrate the ways in which some of these issues play out in practice, we focus on three cases providing images of how online and offline diplomacy functions in different contexts.

### 1. *The Iran nuclear negotiations*

The experience of the ongoing Iran nuclear talks fits most closely with traditional foreign policy. It focuses on the military security agenda and the processes surrounding the P5+1 negotiations which privilege confidentiality over transparency. The pattern of the Lausanne phase of the negotiations in March 2015 was marked by the usual practice of deadlines regularly missed, imminent departures and last minute 'breakthroughs'. The 600+ journalists accredited to the talks had limited access to the hotel where the negotiations were held. Digital technology made an appearance in the shape of secure videoconferencing between President Obama and the US negotiators.

Surprisingly, a key role was performed by a very traditional mode of communications technology: the mobile whiteboard. Under-secretary of State Wendy Sherman hit on the idea of the whiteboard as a means of illustrating what she called the 'Rubik's cube' of complexity comprising the negotiations. The whiteboard was wheeled around the negotiating rooms as she and John Kerry met Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif and his team. This had an advantage for the Iranians as it avoided paper documents which had to be taken back to Tehran. But it also showed its dangers when a US negotiator inadvertently used a permanent marker to write down classified calculations.<sup>39</sup>

Whilst tweeting was a feature of the talks, the principal role for social media was in 'selling' the outcome of the negotiations to domestic audiences. The 2013 talks were also marked by Foreign Minister Zarif's embrace of social networks and the creation of a new website, [Nuclearenergy.ir](http://Nuclearenergy.ir), which aimed at explaining the history and motives of Iran's nuclear programme. Zarif used social media platforms extensively on his return to Tehran – both to defend the deal at home and to 'frame' it from an Iranian perspective for an international audience. As one observer noted: 'Twitter diplomacy has helped President Rouhani maintain public support, bolstering his leadership image abroad. The contrast to his predecessor could not be starker.'<sup>40</sup>

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37 Fisher, A. 'Incorporating Big Data: one giant leap for diplomacy', *CPD Blog*, USC Center on Public Diplomacy', 30 September 2014; Fisher, A. 'Data-driven diplomacy: a practical guide', *CPD Blog*, USC Center on Public Diplomacy', 23 February 2015.

38 Fisher, 'Data-driven diplomacy'.

39 'Whiteboard diplomacy: permanent marker sparks panic at Iran talks', *The Guardian*, 5 April 2015.

40 Kabir, A. 'Twiplomacy and the Iran Nuclear Deal', *The Diplomat*, 11 December 2013.

## 2. *The Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA)*

Almost as soon as the negotiations which produced ACTA had been concluded, it fell apart amidst recriminations, claims and counter-claims regarding its nature and the way in which the negotiations had been conducted. In part this reflected what was perceived as a lack of transparency surrounding the talks – a factor in the problems surrounding the TTIP negotiations mentioned in chapter 3 of this report. The purpose of ACTA was to address the problem of the growing trade in counterfeit and pirated products and the challenges that this presents to intellectual property and to consumers from the sale of fake products. The Romanian prime minister couldn't explain why he had signed the agreement whilst the Polish prime minister announced that he would suspend ratification. This followed on the collapse of the US Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA), a piece of Hollywood sponsored anti-piracy legislation which had attracted vociferous opposition.

Whilst both TTIP and ACTA shared a place on the trade diplomacy agendas, the latter touched on highly sensitive areas of cyber politics and diplomacy. In other words, digitalization – specifically aspects of Internet freedom such as the principle of 'net neutrality' – was both the issue and provided the resources for opposing the treaty. Opposition reflected concerns at the potential impact of ACTA on Internet freedom but also at what was seen as the closed nature of the negotiations. An EU Commission Vice-president recognised the failure of the EU to listen to the growing voices of opposition and to engage with them through social media: 'We saw how our absence in the world of social media on this particular topic caused us a lot of troubles. I think this is a lesson for all of us that we have to be much more active and in a much more communicative mood when it comes to such sensitive topics in the future'.<sup>41</sup> The Australian Government, one of the 37 countries involved in the negotiations, posted an 'ACTA Factsheet' on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website seeking to rebut nine 'myths' about the agreement. This was too little, too late. By this stage, a global campaign conducted by a growing community of activists had framed the issue and generated overwhelming opposition to it.<sup>42</sup>

## 3. *The Prevention of Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative*

If ACTA provided a case study in the consequences of the failure to use social media, the Prevention of Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) has been taken as an example of their potential. Concern with the use of rape and sexual violence as a tactic in warfare and terrorism, and as a tool for ethnic cleansing has long been an issue of global concern but has generated little effective action. The picture changed in 2012 when the then British Foreign Secretary, William Hague, in conjunction with UNHCR special envoy Angelina Jolie, launched the PSVI. The overall goal was to end what was seen as a 'culture of impunity' whereby the perpetrators of mass rape – as in Bosnia, Rwanda, East Timor and Syria – went unpunished and the survivors received inadequate support.

In April 2013, during the UK G8 presidency, G8 foreign ministers agreed a landmark Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict followed by the adoption of a UN Security Council resolution later that year. During the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly, 155 countries endorsed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence

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41 <http://siliconangle.com/blog/2012/03/21/eu-admits-mistake-over-acta-as-internet-freedoms-are-debated/> (Quoted in Kurbalija, J. 'How institutions can effectively use social media?' Diplo blog 23 March 2012. <http://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/how-institutions-can-effectively-use-social-media>)

42 ACTA up: protests across Europe may kill an anti-piracy treaty. *The Economist*, 11 February 2012.

in Conflict, agreeing that there should be no peace agreements giving amnesty to those involved in rape. This was followed by the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict held in London in June 2014. The overall aim here (see Box 4.3) was to build awareness of the issue and to enhance the network of stakeholders that had coalesced around the issue: 125 country delegations, NGOs such as Amnesty International, Care International and War Child, survivors and activists in London, together with UK embassies around the world organising 84 hours of events to generate global support for the Initiative. Central to the digital strategy was the ‘hackathon’ bringing together participants from around the world. The DiploHack event (see Box 4.4) built on earlier experiments by the Dutch and Swedish MFAs focused on a range of issues.

### **Box 4.3**

#### **A digital campaign like no other: supporting the PSVI**



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

So how did the FCO’s digital team help support the overall Summit communications effort?

#### **We started by setting out some clear aims for our digital campaign.**

- Engage people with the aims of the Summit and raise awareness of the issue
- Build a community of supporters and advocates
- Enable global 24/7 participation in the Summit
- Drive footfall to the free public events in the Summit Fringe
- Answer questions and provide information about the Summit

#### ***Raising awareness***

We set up dedicated social media channels aimed at building a community of supporters. We were particularly keen to reach an audience in conflict affected countries, post conflict countries and influencers in the G8 countries.

In the space of a few months our End Sexual Violence in Conflict Facebook page attracted over 10,000 followers worldwide. Over half of the page followers were in the priority countries. We focused on creating visual content including infographics and ‘photo quotes’ featuring prominent personalities associated with the campaign. Content reached an audience of up to 247,000 people through sharing. Most impressive was the high level of engagement with the page, which received over 2,000 comments and 6,000 shares, with hugely positive debate on the UK’s lead in tackling this issue.

Our @end\_svc twitter channel aimed to provide rolling updates for the NGOs, experts and charities attending the summit as well as explain and discuss the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative. With nearly 9,000 followers, engagement was high and @end\_svc mentioned 47,000 times between March and June, reaching an audience of millions.

*A. Daniels and R. Childs, 'A digital campaign like no other: supporting the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, FCO 14 July 2014. <http://blogs.fco.gov.uk/digitaldiplomacy/2014/07/14/a-digital-campaign-like-no-other-supporting-the-preventing-sexual-violence-in-conflict-initiative/>*

#### **Box 4.4**

##### **#DiploHack and PSVI**

#DiploHack combines the specific know-how and skill sets of diplomats, social entrepreneurs, tech developers and designers, along with that of journalists, academics, NGOs and businesses to 'hack' traditional diplomatic problems in start-up style groups. **A #DiploHack can, for example, result in an app to help victims of sexual violence (#DiploHack London 2014) or a website that exposes the conflicting interests of politicians (#DiploHack Tallinn 2013). The most important outcome, however, is the raised awareness for a particular issue and the formation of a network of stakeholders that are committed to addressing the issue.**

**The greatest strength of #DiploHack is the unusual collaboration between very different stakeholders. #DiploHacks encourage diplomats and other stakeholders to step out of their comfort zone and work together on creative and innovate solutions to pressing public issues.** In order to achieve this, #DiploHack events often consist of an *ideation* phase, in which the problem and some preliminary outlines for the solution are defined, and a *hackathon*, in which tech developers attempt to design the solution for the problem. However, this set-up can easily be modified, depending on the purpose of the event.

The first DiploHack was organised by the Dutch and Swedish embassy in London in 2013 to address issues regarding the sustainability of the food supply chain. The success of the first DiploHack inspired the Dutch embassies in Tallinn (#DiploHack Tallinn, 2013) and Tbilisi (DiploHack Tbilisi//UNDP Innovation Challenge, 2014), the Swedish ministry of foreign affairs (Stockholm Initiative for Digital Diplomacy, 2014) and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (**DiploHack to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, 2014**) to organise similar events on a range of issues. Other embassies of the Dutch and Swedish ministries of foreign affairs are now also considering to organise #DiploHack events.

<http://www.diplohack.org/>

The PSVI provided an example of ways in which big data can be used in analysing the dynamics of digital diplomacy.<sup>43</sup> Mapping the online conversations that developed around the Global Summit and applying transmedia engagement techniques helped to demonstrate

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43 Fisher, A. 'Incorporating Big Data: one giant leap for diplomacy'.

how digital engagement can boost a campaign of this kind.<sup>44</sup> Analyzing communication flows via retweets around embassy networks helped FCO digital diplomacy analysts to evaluate how communities develop amongst embassy followers. Mapping the data demonstrated how engagement with leading figures such as Pope Francis may enhance campaigns and provide clues as to maximizing digital strategies.

In each of these three cases, communication flows were distinctive and reflected the character of the issues and the range of actors and interests involved. In many senses, the Iran nuclear negotiations and the PSVI were poles apart. In the first case, the negotiations accorded with more traditional images of diplomacy: at the same time, digital diplomacy was present in the management of domestic constituencies and has been credited with symbolizing changes in the overall Iranian stance. With PSVI, communications through social media gradually permeated the DNA of the negotiations. The entire process of establishing the agenda and assembling and monitoring the networks of interests on which it rested demanded the use of digital resources.

## Consular diplomacy

The consular challenge is perhaps the most pressing one at the opening of the digital age, with citizens demanding help from government and services that meet both the technological standard set by society as well as the human touch that is essential to this form of diplomacy. The rather outmoded term ‘consular affairs’ no longer covers what is going on, and harks back to the image of a world that never existed: one in which consular matters and diplomatic affairs did not appear to intersect. Consular diplomacy overlaps with other areas of MFA activity such as economic diplomacy, public diplomacy, and development aid and consular controversies have the capacity to seriously affect overall bilateral relations. There are many examples of serious political frictions triggered by consular issues, and high-profile cases tend to attract a lot of attention at home. What could be called the ‘five P’s’ – **p**ublic opinion, **p**arliament, the **p**ress, **p**rin cipals within foreign ministries, and **p**oliticians – need no persuasion that consular services are a core task of government, and this is the area of diplomatic activity where the technological challenge is most palpable.

Inside MFAs consular work has come a long way, but now represents the highest volume of interaction with the public. In terms of the number of staff, consular departments are the largest sector within many if not most foreign ministries. In a 2013 survey of consular officials commissioned by the Global Consular Forum (GCF), an informal conference of foreign ministries, George Haynal, Michael Welsh and Mikayla Wicks sum up the challenge as follows:

*“More” defines the consular landscape: more travelers, more overseas workers, more scrutiny, more complex case work, more emergencies, more exotic locations, and more expectations of a timely and personalized service. Technology is a major new factor, empowering governments, but also energizing clients more.*<sup>45</sup>

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44 Butler, T. ‘Mapping the online conversation of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict’ 29 August 2014. <http://blogs.fco.gov.uk/digitaldiplomacy/2014/08/29/mapping-the-online-conversation-of-the-global-summit-to-end-sexual-violence-in-conflict/>; James Pamment, ‘Digital diplomacy as transmedia engagement: Aligning theories of participatory culture with international advocacy campaigns’, *New Media & Society* 17/1 (2015).

45 George Haynal, Michael Welsh, Louis Century & Sean Tyler *The Consular Function in the 21st Century*, Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto, 27 March 2013. Underlining added.

With more complex patterns of global relations, the list of consular tasks and headaches is growing and the implications for diplomats are testing. Not only have demands on them increased, the provision of consular services has become a test of their legitimacy. Facing increasingly technologically enabled citizens, government failure to respond *immediately* to crisis situations and to satisfy public and media expectations of support for nationals caught up in them, is now a test of diplomatic effectiveness – and one that governments are acutely sensitive to.

Additionally, consular work places ever-greater demands on scarce diplomatic resources. Take a country with a small population like Norway, with just over 5 million residents, where between one third and half of the population is travelling abroad each year. In 2012, the UK FCO dealt with over 1 million general consular enquiries and 100,000 consular cases, 20,000 of which required consular assistance. These European figures may seem big, but are of course dwarfed by the sheer magnitude of consular work facing much more populous countries such as Indonesia or China, where the consular challenge features high on the agenda of government.

As the Global Consular Forum survey makes clear, MFAs fear that their consular departments are falling behind the expectations of society when it comes to the use of technology, in particular social media. One of the top-five pressures perceived by consular services is to keep up with rapidly evolving technology. The fear of technology failures also ranks high in consular crisis and emergency management scenarios – second to the lack of citizen engagement with their government. Due to the fast pace of technological change, it is hard for consular departments to plan for the long term. In the years ahead for many MFAs in Europe the challenge is that they have to cut their budget whilst not cutting their ‘duty of care’ to the degree that it would affect citizen satisfaction.

Faced with such dilemmas, MFAs see quick-wins for digitalization in the area of generic travel information as well as more tailor-made customer advice. The short-term consular solution is to have a good website, offer automated services for travelling citizens and make use of social networking sites in emergencies and crisis situations. In Australia, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has developed its Smartraveller website on which it posts travel updates and revisions to travel advisories for 169 overseas destinations. In Finland, the MFA has created ‘The World Surprises’ map service which enables travellers to share travel experiences and to access MFA information on travel destinations.<sup>46</sup> One of the aims of these developments is to sensitise the travelling public to possible dangers, but also to establish reasonable expectations as to what consular support people can receive overseas. In both the UK and Australia, this message has been reinforced through television documentaries (‘The Embassy’ on the Nine Network in Australia) that are focusing on consular work in embassies (Box 4.5).

A growing number of governments now offer 24/7 services and communicates via more traditional channels such as call centres and social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Direct communication with citizens-turned-customers is now centred on the various options offered by smartphones. Mexico is one of the leading countries servicing its citizens with a sophisticated travel App – the Mexican *Secretaría* has fifty consulates in

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46 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, ‘Did the world surprise you, too?’ <http://formin.finland.fi/public/Print.aspx?contentid=317925&nodeid=15148&culture=en-US&contentlan=2>

one single country, the United States – whilst others are investing in online wizards offering advice varying from passport enquiries to traveling with children and emergency services. Blue sky thinking on consular services aided by developments in the field of big data includes future or futuristic scenarios with not only people but also their belongings being tracked down by means of GPS tracking. But with the current pace of technological change, predicting future developments is almost impossible.

Among the multiple digital challenges, it is worth noting two concerning communication and a third one indicative of the trend towards more collaborative diplomacy, mentioned in the report of a 2013 Wilton Park (UK) practitioners' conference on trends in consular practice. The first one is that of citizens' expectations regarding quick solutions and the ability to maximize the use of technology in providing consular services whilst providing face-to-face assistance when required. Here we see the repetition of a familiar theme, the trade-off between 'online' and 'offline' affecting a range of other areas of diplomacy in the digital age.

Next, consular officers expect that citizens will want to communicate with government representatives in the social media. We can already observe governments using for example Twitter in the case of natural disasters and other emergencies, but the other side of the coin is that individual consular officers helping people in distress are understandably reluctant to reveal their identity by using personal social media accounts in the line of duty. Broadly speaking, as the 2013 conference report states: "The challenge for MFAs is to move from a static 'registry' approach, to interactive, information on demand, flash organization and crowd-sourced intelligence. Structuring mobile applications that encourage people to add value to the applications as they use them can provide mutual benefits to the owners and the users of information. Two-way communication via social media enables MFAs to receive citizen innovations and insights and raise citizens' awareness of travel warnings, particularly in crisis."<sup>47</sup>

Another area of consular innovation is that of public-private partnerships. Earlier in this report we already mentioned the scope for collaboration with the private sector in the field of digital diplomacy. Starting from straightforward collaborative arrangements with mobile phone providers to using free or cheap services of internet giants such as Google and social networks like LinkedIn, it is clear that the private sector also sees business opportunities in consular diplomacy. The protection of citizens abroad requires ICT systems that exceed the capacities of small technological players like foreign ministries; they call for a degree digital literacy that cannot yet be taken for granted within many MFAs, and they require a round-the-clock sophisticated consular management operation that is very different from other fields of diplomatic activity. There are also ethical considerations, privacy concerns and a range of other issues that come with the digitalization of consular diplomacy. That reminds us of the wider societal dimensions and multiple effects of technological change on diplomacy – which has always been and will remain a social institution.

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47 Conference report, *Contemporary consular practice; trends and challenges*, 3-5 September 2013, Wilton Park.

**Box 4.5**

**Australia: mixing TV and social media in managing consular work**

DFAT may once have been accused of being a social media ‘dinosaur’, but social media is now playing an increasing role in the way we communicate with travelling Australians. In another first, the Department hosted a 90-minute online forum on its Smartraveller Facebook page immediately after the third episode of ‘The Embassy’ last night. Departmental experts in consular matters, passports and travel advisories were on hand to answer questions from the public stemming from that night’s episode – which dealt with a missing person, theft, scam, hospitalisation and an Australian facing criminal charges. We intend to host a number of such forums for targeted audiences, including students and travel agents. Along with ongoing outreach to key demographics, such as partnerships with universities and youth-focused organisations, we hope this will help better inform the Australian public about the consular role.

**J. Brown “‘The Embassy’ and DFAT’s consular role: Helping Australians travel smarter” the *interpreter*, Lowy Institute 3 November 2014.**

## Diplomatic structures in the digital age

Digitalization does not change the fundamental functions of diplomacy, but the texture of diplomacy is undergoing significant change. We have interpreted this in terms of our ‘integrative diplomacy’ model. The impact of developments in ICT has to be seen in the context of these broader evolutionary trends, and as a constituent part of a changing landscape in which diplomatic tools are reconfigured to meet the demands of changing processes (see the statement from the Stockholm Initiative for Digital Diplomacy, Box 4.6). This reshaped environment poses significant issues for the machinery of diplomacy at all levels – from multilateral agencies to the familiar forms of national diplomacy. The debate joins a long-running dialogue concerning the relevance of the foreign ministry in a policy milieu where the character of ‘foreignness’ is problematic. The utility, shape and functions of the network of diplomatic posts in an interdependent world are equally questioned. Clearly, digitalization complicates this argument: it can either be seen as lending strength to the ‘diplomatic skeptics’ for whom the logic of the MFA and diplomatic representation seems weak<sup>48</sup>, or as a significant resource in reasserting their relevance.

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48 See, for example, Dejevsky, M. ‘In a globalised world, do we still need the Foreign Office?’ *The Guardian*, 30 December 2013.

**Box 4.6**  
**Digital diplomacy**

- Digital diplomacy is diplomacy equipped with a range of new tools. The main tasks of diplomacy are still to observe, analyse, report and act with the goal of promoting a country's interests.
- In short, digital diplomacy is about using the Internet to meet the goals of diplomacy. The task is still to gather and analyse information of importance to a country's foreign policy positions and communicate these, safeguard your own country's economic, political and commercial interests abroad and help your country's citizens in emergency situations. But the digital environment offers new ways to communicate and opportunities to express yourself.
- This requires a new approach and constant adaptation for everyone who works with diplomacy.
- Obtaining information, which traditionally takes place via embassies, permanent delegations and temporarily posted diplomats, can now be helped along by digital information sources, such as social networks, microblogs and search engines. Digital channels can also be used to inform governments, international organisations and others of a country's position on a certain issue.

*Stockholm Initiative for Digital Diplomacy March 2014.*

Adaptation to the digital age is bound up with the stories that diplomats tell themselves about their roles (and, of course, their importance) and, ultimately is likely to be a factor determining the future of the structures in which they operate. The impact and significance of digital diplomacy assumes two interconnected dimensions. The first relates to the needs of the contemporary international policy environment and how this impacts on the structures of government and diplomacy. The second derives from the character of MFAs as organisations and the nature of the diplomatic profession. Digitalization adds a layer to ongoing debates about the efficiency and legitimacy of diplomacy and its practitioners. As far as efficiency is concerned, digital diplomacy poses questions as to how new tools such as social media networks can enhance the performance of key diplomatic roles. This intersects with the question regarding legitimacy. It is easy to see that adaptation is not a matter of choice. A failure to adopt new technologies questions the standing of the MFA as a modern organization within the shifting structures of government and, in the final analysis, its continuing relevance.

### **Digitalization, the national diplomatic system and the MFA**

The debates about efficiency and legitimacy require that we look at the MFA in the broader context of the national diplomatic system (NDS) – that is the totality of departments and agencies involved in the shaping and implementation of international policy. The character of the NDS reflects two trends in foreign policy management: *fragmentation* as sectoral ministries acquire enhanced international functions and *concentration* reflecting the importance of central agencies, particularly prime ministerial and presidential offices. The MFA can thus be seen as a distinct *subsystem* of the NDS comprising two key elements:

the centre (the ministry 'HQ') and the diplomatic network – or 'peripheries'. How does digitalization fit into this image?

What are the responses to the problems and opportunities of digitalization by government as a whole? A recent OECD study paints an uneven picture of the responses of member governments to social media use, particularly the lack of an overall strategy:

...few national governments in OECD countries have a dedicated strategy or overarching plan for institutional use of social media. Among those governments that do, most consider social media as being mainly an additional tool to improve public communications. Only a few governments try to genuinely leverage social media for more advanced purposes like involving citizens in public policy processes of transforming and redesigning public service delivery.<sup>49</sup>

The problems of foreign policy management in a digital age reflect those confronting government as a whole. One of the accepted mantras of contemporary diplomacy – echoed in a paper from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see Box 4.7) – is that it is increasingly a 'whole of government' activity. Consequently, digitalization carries with it implications for the relationships between the component elements of the NDS – not least diplomacy, development and defence. One issue for the MFA in its national setting is, therefore, its relationship with other components of government – an issue that predates digital agendas – and the impact that new communications technologies have on them. Digital tools facilitate linkages between key parts of the NDS, but in a fragmented foreign policy bureaucracy they also pose a more fundamental question: Who are the 'leaders' in deploying them to control global narratives. The Israeli Defence Forces, for example, have pioneered state engagement with social media, a position echoed in the US where the Defence Department is often portrayed as a more muscular and more effective player than the State Department. In the UK, the army has recently created a 'special force of Facebook warriors skilled in psychological operations and use of social media to engage in unconventional warfare in the information age.'<sup>50</sup>

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49 Mickoleit, A., (2014) 'Social media use by governments: a policy primer to discuss trends, identify policy opportunities and guide decision makers', *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance* no 26, OECD Publishing. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jxrcmghmk0s-en>>

50 MacAskill, E. 'Army sends tweet brigade into battle', *The Guardian*, 31 January 2015.

#### **Box 4.7**

##### **Modernising the Netherlands diplomatic service**

Modernising the diplomatic service is part of a wider reform of the civil service. The principles behind the reform process *apply to the government's entire international function. The basic principles of government service provision apply equally abroad.* Adaptability, involvement of civil society and the private sector in policymaking, investment in staff and reducing the internal decision-making and supervisory burden are paramount in improving the design and functioning of the Dutch government's international efforts. Throughout the government, elements of the international function are being merged for policy implementation and operational management purposes.

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Working together for the Netherlands, Worldwide: Moving to the forefront of modern diplomacy, 2013.* <Netherlands MFA kamerbrief-280613-working-together-for-the-netherlands-worldwide copy> [Emphasis added]**

## **Digitalization and the MFA subsystem**

It is hard to generalize about foreign ministries and their response to change, but it is obvious that communication structures and processes are the key resource for all MFAs and their diplomatic networks. How has digitalization impacted on the MFA subsystem within the broader national diplomatic system? It has distinctive characteristics that are a product of its historical evolution, culture, role perceptions and the mix of tasks that have accrued to it over time. As we have seen, in the nineteenth century the electric telegraph interacted with broader social, bureaucratic and political changes impacting on foreign ministries. Allowing for the obvious differences, there is a striking resemblance in the issues posed by digital technologies:

- Do they change the roles and relationships between the centre (MFA) and the peripheries (diplomatic posts) of the subsystem?
- What consequences do they have for the roles and role perceptions of professional diplomats?
- How are rules developed and risks managed in developing online diplomatic strategies?
- What are the emerging criteria for success in developing and evaluating digital capacity and performance?

Enter Hood and Margetts' principle of cybernetic systems.<sup>51</sup> Their argument is that any system when relating to and managing its environment requires two sets of tools: '*detectors*' – all the instruments government uses for acquiring and processing information, and '*effectors*' – the range of tools available for making an impact on the outside world. The range of tools varies both between and within governments but comprises a broad set of categories:

- *Nodality*: the property of being a significant node in an information network.
- *Authority*: the possession of legal or official power relevant to the performance of functions.

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51 Hood, C and Margetts H., *The Tools of Government in the Digital Age*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

- *Treasure*: the possession of financial resources employed in exercising influence and/or buying information
- *Organization*: a set of human skills and materials (buildings and equipment) related to the roles of government generally and its specific subsections.

When applied to the MFA subsystem, we can see that it is characterised by a particular configuration of ‘effectors’ and ‘detectors’ (see table 4.1). Nodality is the most important as the subsystem relies on its location within social and informational networks – both within the broader NDS and across the world – for acquiring information and exerting influence. Of the remaining three tools, organisation is the most significant: human and physical resources clearly determine the MFA’s ability to capitalise on nodality.

## The MFA as node and digitalization

How does digitalization impact on nodality? The first general point to make is that the state of digital diplomacy is, to use the term applied by one of its practitioners, ‘messy’.<sup>52</sup> Diplomacy is passing through one of its continuing transformational phases as it responds to exogenous and endogenous forces and digitalization is part of this picture.

The first, and obvious, point to be made is that digitalization is a two-edged sword. Claims that MFAs may have the role of information ‘gatekeeper’ can no longer be taken seriously. At the same time, digitalization in the shape of access to big data, crowdsourcing ideas and the development of knowledge management tools can strengthen MFA nodality in both its detector and effector roles. Furthermore, the current explosion of information and disinformation potentially enhances the value of the MFA’s nodality in terms of its analytical capacity – that is using the skills of diplomacy to interpret data. In this light, it is not surprising that knowledge management was the earliest manifestation of digitalization in the US State Department.<sup>53</sup>

Knowing how and where to utilise and ‘package’ online and offline strategies is becoming a more telling task. Taking the Prevention of Sexual Violence issue discussed above as one example, British diplomats both in London and in posts experimented with different forms of social media blended with more traditional media-focused strategies – and found that Twitter provided an immediacy and a ‘buzz’ in relating to audiences whilst it was more challenging to find an audience through Facebook.<sup>54</sup> Digitalization offers the opportunity to strengthen general ‘broadcast’ messages whilst also providing the opportunity to target specific groups. The trick is to select the appropriate nodal tools and strategies for the job in hand.

## The relationship between foreign ministries and embassies

A key characteristic of the MFA as an integral diplomatic network, as noted earlier, is the distribution of roles between the ‘hub’ of the system and its ‘peripheries’. This comprises one of the features of MFA’s nodality: it gathers and transmits information, processes and employs it for goal attainment. Digitalization touches can provide an added resource for both elements of the system, and it can help to change the relationships between the two parts

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52 Sandre, A., *Twitter for Diplomats*, Geneva, DiploFoundation, 2013: p. 58.

53 Hanson, F. *Baked in and Wired: eDiplomacy@State*, Foreign Policy Paper Series no 30, Washington D.C., Brookings Institution, 25 October 2012: pp. 30-38.

54 Information provided in discussions in Geneva and London June-August 2014.

of the subsystem and their roles within it. Digital technologies have had an impact on both dimensions. Significantly, they have also strengthened the linkage between them. The adoption of secure e-mail systems in the 1990s, for example, has been seen as providing an opportunity to redistribute policy making functions from the centre to the periphery, and to change established hierarchical patterns of information distribution. Consequently, the flow of information can become less a 'hub and spoke' and more a network-like or reticulated system in which the relationships between centre and peripheries are becoming closer and more complex. But the jury is still out as some diplomats claim that the more recent deployment of ICT has tended towards increasing micromanagement from the centre and reinforced hierarchical structures rather than what was the intention: enhanced operational effectiveness.

Associated with this, are the organisational resources available to MFAs in an era of growing scarcity. Again, this is not new. The concept of 'virtual diplomacy' in the 1990s was bound up with the call for expanded representation, resulting in greater demands on post-Cold War era diplomatic networks. Technology provided part of the answer as MFAs experimented with new means of establishing presence in more economical forms than the traditional embassy. Later developments in ICT have more profound implications as the purpose and forms of representation in maintaining diplomatic presence are questioned.

In the world of digital diplomacy, information flows within national diplomatic systems and between MFAs become more complex. Embassies embed themselves through social media in networks linking embassies, their own MFAs and other parts of their government, as well as host MFAs. Ilan Manor has examined this phenomenon in the context of the 'social network' of embassies in Israel (see Diagram 4.1). Noting that this is surprisingly limited with only eleven of the eighty-two embassies accredited to Israel with active Twitter accounts and a presence on Facebook, it nevertheless demonstrates the possibilities of social media in reinforcing nodality. Not only do embassies follow their own MFAs, they can create a social network of foreign embassies in a host country and follow its MFA. Manor notes the opportunities that such a network can offer:

If the ministry is followed by other embassies it is able to effectively disseminate foreign policy messages to other countries. Moreover, if it follows foreign embassies' digital diplomacy channels, the local MFA can gather information regarding foreign policy initiatives of other countries. In the case of Israel, the Israeli MFA is located at the very heart of the local diplomatic social network...<sup>55</sup>

There is however no one-size-fits all for communications strategies. As Archetti notes in her discussion of the deployment of social media by foreign diplomats based in London, the character of media strategies is not technologically determined. They reflect the environment in which such media are used and the role of diplomats as agents in their local settings. Facebook, Twitter and other digital tools may well be useful but outcomes are dependent on contexts and the behaviour of diplomats as social agents.<sup>56</sup>

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55 Manor, I., 'The Social Network of Foreign Embassies in Israel', *Exploring Digital Diplomacy*, 30 July 2014 <<http://digdipblog.com/2014/07/30/the-social-network-of-foreign-embassies-in-israel/comment-page-1/>>

56 Archetti, C. 'The impact of new media on diplomatic practice: an evolutionary model of change', *Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 7(2) 2012, pp. 181-206.

Attitudes of individual diplomats towards social media vary a great deal. Former US ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, is a case in point. McFaul (a Stanford academic) was rated amongst the 'Twitterati 100' for 2013, using social media to engage in a 'Twitter war' with the Russian MFA and to engage with the Russian public on both US foreign policy and his personal life.<sup>57</sup> This appears to have changed somewhat following McFaul's resignation and his replacement by a career diplomat, John Tefft. Unlike McFaul, Tefft has no personal Twitter or Facebook accounts, the embassy being represented on these social media platforms by standard organization accounts on Twitter and the US Embassy Moscow page on Facebook. The fact that as in this case, the individual performance of consecutive ambassadors is being monitored compared and reported in the same social media is new and will probably leave some diplomats worrying about the impact of social media on their day-to-day activities. This should equally apply to an initiative like *Diplotwoops*, a Twitter account claiming that it tweets all sent messages by individual diplomats across the world which, for one reason or another, they themselves have deleted.

## Digitalization and foreign policy organization

The significance of nodality is closely related to how the MFA is organized. What are the critical factors here? One obvious point to make is that digitalization, whilst it might result in cost savings, is not a cure-all for diminished organizational strength. The consequences of financial stringency in the wake of the global financial crisis, a feature of most MFAs, are unlikely to be reversed by digital strategies alone. There are four organisational factors that will determine the extent to which digitalization is embedded in the system and thus contribute to overall performance:

*1. Supportive internal structures.* Experience appears to demonstrate the importance of creating units to support digitalization within the MFA – as in the US State Department and the FCO Digital Transformation Unit established in 2013. As we have seen with public diplomacy, one task here is to spread the 'message' outside such units to the MFA as a whole. A no less critical concern is to keep the department's top-level management engaged in digital innovation, a sector of the MFA mostly inhabited by people who are outside the informal in-house circuit of career diplomats. Disseminating digital technologies and strategies can also be supported by engagement with international initiatives such as the Stockholm Initiative on Digital Diplomacy (SIDDD).

*2. The presence of effective digital 'champions'.* The relatively short history of digitalization points to the importance of support at several levels. In the US, the role of Hillary Clinton in spreading the digital creed in the State Department, and her appointment of Alec Ross and Jared Cohen to further this, has been extensively discussed. Elsewhere, active politicians in 'twiplomacy' such as Carl Bildt in Sweden and Indian Prime Minister Modi provide significant political support. Equally, the presence of active, or hyper-active, champions within the MFAs itself seems to be important. Alongside former US ambassador McFaul, active promoters can be found in the form of Andreas Sandre in the Italian diplomatic service and Tom Fletcher, UK ambassador to Lebanon. But the definition of the effective digital diplomat is a matter of dispute. Are those tireless operators with thousands or even scores of thousands of followers by definition effective, that is working in the interests of agreed policy aims?

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57 Wright, W., 'America's digital diplomacy in Russia after Michael McFaul', *Global Voices* 22 January 2015  
<<https://globalvoicesonline.org/2015/01/22/americas-digital-diplomacy-in-russia-after-michael-mcfaul/>>

3. *Roles and skills.* The emergence of digital diplomacy requires the development of the skills necessary for its effective use. Digital mainstreaming within the MFA subsystem is one of the key challenges just as it is for government more broadly. But this has to be seen in the general context of what diplomacy is for and how diplomats' roles are adapting and may need to adapt at a faster pace to a changing and more networked environment. This includes the importance of developing strategic visions of global agendas and understanding growing conflicts over norms and rules. It also includes the ability for individual diplomats to establish and manage networks in which they have more pronounced and more externally oriented roles as diplomatic entrepreneurs. In networking terminology, this includes them taking on roles as 'spanners' between diverse groups of actors and network 'weavers', whose business it is to create new interactions among stakeholders – in the pursuit of joint problem solving and co-creating solutions for complex policy challenges. All of these tasks and roles antedate the various conundrums of the digital age. Longer standing 'offline' issues cut across the challenges and opportunities presented by the advent of digital diplomacy. This takes us back to the comment by Secretary of State John Kerry quoted earlier: there is no such thing as digital diplomacy – only diplomacy. However true, this does raise management questions regarding the expectations surrounding an online presence by individual diplomats.

4. *Rules and risk management.* Every technological innovation brings with it risks. Those attendant on the use of social media by diplomats have received considerable coverage and are sometimes given as reasons why it should be used with extreme caution – although it is notable that the instances cited are limited, such as the experiences of the US embassy in Cairo during the Arab Spring. However, the point is that this is part of broader developments affecting diplomacy, government and society.

More open and diffuse communication patterns supported by technology such as the smart-phone are now a feature of foreign policy as they are of politics. But for diplomacy, there is a particular challenge in the shape of the tension between the norms of confidentiality regarded as a functional element of the negotiating environment and the demands for transparency. These build on earlier problems linked to the development of public diplomacy and norms of non-involvement in the domestic affair of other countries. Host governments (as with China) may not respond favourably to embassy staff engaging directly with their populations.

At the other end of the MFA subsystem, governments and bureaucracies may find it hard to adapt to the demands of greater openness and a decreasing sense of control. To take Canada as an example, Roland Paris has argued that the main reason why the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development is 'lagging behind' in adopting digital diplomacy is the dominance in Ottawa of what he terms a 'message control regime' which runs counter to the logic of digitalization.<sup>58</sup> The development of social media guidelines – which a growing number of MFAs now have in place – can offer help here but touch on age-old diplomatic norms as well as time-resistant elements of professional culture. Diplomacy's adaptation to the digital age is bound to take time whilst the compression of time is simultaneously the big issue, compounded by the fact that in the foreseeable future it will remain hard for MFAs to keep up with digital developments outside government.

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58 Paris, R. *The Digital Diplomacy Revolution: Why is Canada Lagging Behind?* Calgary, Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, June 2013: p.10.

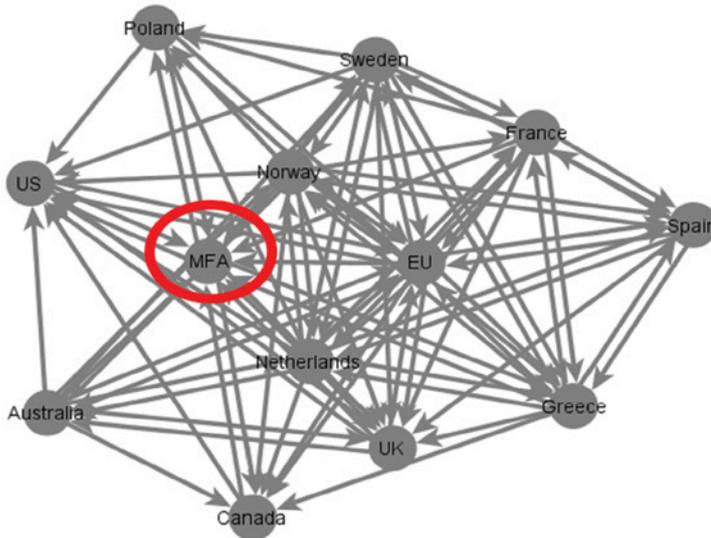
## Conclusion

The processes of diplomacy and the structures that exist to facilitate them are of course inextricably linked. Changes in the former require adaptation of the latter if the institutions of diplomacy (whether in their multilateral or national iterations) are to remain relevant to the needs of local and global communities. The consequences of digitalization in this context are complex. It is not simply the case that foreign ministries and other diplomatic agencies have to function online. The challenges are much greater. The DNA of diplomacy is changing. Blends of offline and online strategies have to develop to deal with the character of each set of issues that it confronts. Becoming a ‘twiplomat’ will not of itself guarantee success, but ignoring the meanings and significance of digitalization will prove to be equally misguided.

**Table 4.1 The tools of the MFA subsystem and digitalization**

Tools	Forms	Impact of digitalization
<b>Nodality</b>	<p>The key tool of the MFA subsystem reflecting its strategic location in informational networks. Based on sophisticated systems of detecting and effecting tools linking the MFA, diplomatic networks and other government departments.</p> <p>Information is the key resource in exerting influence in the shaping and implementing of international policy.</p> <p>Institutional memory, information gathering techniques and strategies and analytical capacity are key facets of both detector and effector tools.</p>	<p>Challenges the place of the MFA in the information environment. It is no longer the privileged possessor of information in an increasingly information rich and diffuse information environment. No longer able to lay claim to be an information ‘gatekeeper’.</p> <p>Digital tools may enhance ‘detector’ capacity to gather information and process it through knowledge management tools, big data analysis related to public diplomacy strategies, and crowdsourcing ideas</p> <p>Digital tools become ‘effectors’ in allowing more sophisticated ‘broadcast’ information strategies in consular work and crisis management. New audiences can be reached more effectively. Effective strategies are required to determine which tools are most appropriate in each case.</p> <p>Digitalization can change the roles and responsibilities of the hub and peripheries of the MFA subsystem. Secure e-mail allows policy functions to move overseas and information may flow in a flatter, less hierarchical fashion. The rationale for and forms of overseas representation will change as the logic of presence and access is transformed</p>
<b>Authority</b>	<p>Authority derives from the place of the MFA subsystem in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Limited functional authority (perhaps in visas and passports).</p>	<p>Unlikely to affect the MFA subsystem in terms of its endowment with legal authority. Failure to adapt to digitalisation will weaken legitimacy and thereby non-legal authority both domestically and internationally.</p>
<b>Treasure</b>	<p>Limited. May be more significant where development aid is a function of the MFA subsystem and a major tool of foreign policy.</p>	<p>Digitalisation unlikely to have a major impact.</p>

Tools	Forms	Impact of digitalization
<b>Organisation</b>	Possession of a stock of skilled personnel ('generalists' and 'specialists') able to promote the goals of the MFA subsystem. A stock of 'goods' necessary to the detector and effector processes in the form of 'hardware' enabling a global presence and effective role performance at the centre (MFA).	<p>New digital tools such as e-mail and videoconferencing and social media platforms become potentially valuable resources in the performance of specific roles.</p> <p>Diplomatic role definitions may change as tools such as social media help to rewrite the script of diplomacy. Perception clashes regarding norms of 'diplomatic behaviour' may occur and need to be managed.</p> <p>Social media and other skills need to be promoted and transmitted. Existence of 'digital champions' is critical to success in embedding digitalization. Need for organisational strategies and appropriate training programmes.</p> <p>Modes of managing reputational risk from deployment of digital tools needs to be developed.</p>



**Diagram 4.1 Mapping the social network of foreign embassies in Israel**

From: Manor, I., 'The Social Network of Foreign Embassies in Israel', *Exploring Digital Diplomacy*, 30 July 2014  
 <<http://digdipblog.com/2014/07/30/the-social-network-of-foreign-embassies-in-israel/comment-page-1/>>

# 5 Conclusion

## Why interpreting the digital age and digital diplomacy matters for government

- Digitalization is here to stay – and so is diplomacy. For governments, reconciling the implications of digitalization with the functional performance of diplomacy is no small challenge, but is essential to achieving global and national needs.
- Foreign ministries should work out what they mean by ‘digital diplomacy’. The term requires a greater degree of precision than is commonly given in government circles, which reminds of vague references to ‘soft power’ by political leaders and diplomats.
- Digital diplomacy is more than the application of social media to familiar diplomatic functions, even though the challenge of their use in diplomacy should not be underestimated. Many diplomats and foreign ministries still apply analogue habits and norms to a digital world.
- Understanding digital diplomacy starts with understanding the offline world. Digital diplomacy is a complex amalgam of developments in the ‘offline’ international policy environment (and a new ‘online layer’ which adds significant dimensions to each of these. Those who do for instance not understand the importance of networking as the basis of diplomatic practice, including the need of expanded actor participation, will not get very far in understanding diplomacy in the digital age.
- Digital diplomacy is closely linked to associated debates about e-participation and e-government but has its own distinctive agendas. Digitalization agendas focusing on issues such as cyber security and Internet freedom will become as significant for diplomacy as utilising the technologies on which they rest.
- Those in government should not be lured by explanations of the digital age that are rooted in technological determinism. Innovations in communications technologies depend above all on environmental factors.
- Diplomats will need to apply their skills to disentangling and interpreting key arguments about digitalization. Does it require rewriting the script of foreign policy or is its scope as more limited?

## What digitalization will and will not do to diplomacy

- Reactions to developments in communications technologies and interpretations of their implications for diplomacy generally move through several phases: from a mix of scepticism and hype to gradual acceptance and mainstreaming within organisations. Most foreign ministries are just entering the digital age and find themselves in the first phase.
- Diplomats will find the modalities of digitalization in constant flux and they therefore need to ‘retool’ on a continuous basis. Much of what is now regarded as revolutionary will soon be seen as commonplace or outdated.
- The gap between governments that do not invest in understanding the impact of digitalization on diplomacy and those that do will widen with the speed and velocity that are characteristic of the digital age.

- We can see three types of predictions regarding the impact of digital technologies, echoing responses to globalization from the 1980s onwards, but no single one is likely to dominate the diplomatic landscape in the future:
  1. Digital technologies may herald the **withering away or 'deliquescence'** of diplomacy. The traditional forms and processes of diplomacy will become meshed into broader patterns of global interaction – such as those surrounding global governance.
  2. Such technologies may reinforce the existing **'disintermediation'** trend, whereby diplomats (and other agents) acting between the individual and policy arenas are challenged. The fragmenting information environment empowers non-diplomats claiming a role in complex policy milieus.
  3. Digitalization may result in **de-institutionalised diplomacy**: diplomatic *practice* becomes a *mode of behaviour* rather than a set of institutional structures and processes. In a networked diplomacy environment, performing a diplomatic role is more related to knowledge, capacity and capabilities and less to formal status.

## Digital disruption and the crisis of diplomacy

- Diplomacy is facing 'digital disruption' as new technologies and associated patterns of behaviour develop. These will percolate throughout diplomatic institutions, generating both acceptance and hostility.
- The conventional wisdom among diplomats is that digitalization does not change the fundamental objectives of diplomacy, but offers new ways through which these can be achieved. Governments need to take a more nuanced look, taking into account the different facets of diplomatic practice. Although digital diplomacy is for instance not synonymous with public diplomacy, it is obvious that the resources provided by big data and social media networks greatly enhance the strategies available here. And consular work and crisis management are increasingly impacted by digital technologies.
- Foreign ministries need to be aware of the fact that digitalization will put fundamental norms and rules of diplomacy to the test. The experience of public diplomacy over the last decade, for instance, is an indication of the points at which the 1961 Vienna Convention tested by the actions of diplomats on the ground.

## Diplomacy will be simultaneously online and offline

- The interpretation that governments and other diplomatic actors will need to develop online and offline foreign policies is mistaken. It replicates the errors of earlier dichotomies – not least those which separate the domains of governmental and non-governmental actors. The reality is that diplomats of all types will need to function in both environments.
- Differing blends of 'hybrid' diplomacy are needed. The Iran nuclear negotiations, whilst utilising digital resources in the implementation phase particularly, illustrate the continuing importance of face-to-face negotiations. Experience demonstrates the limits of digital technology in negotiating environments, evidenced by negative responses to the use of smartphones to text and tweet during negotiations. On the other hand, the entire history of the Prevention of Sexual Violence Initiative is bound up with extensive use of digital resources. Diplomats will have to reconcile conflicting demands for online communication and physical presence. In the consular sphere, publics will expect both and MFAs will have to meet these demands.

## Some but not all diplomatic work will be easier

- No area of diplomacy will become redundant as a result of digitalization. Diplomatic functions will be re-defined to meet changing needs. The obvious example here is that of diplomatic reporting, which has changed fundamentally in the changing information environment of the last two decades.
- Gathering information may be easier for foreign ministries: processing and analysing it will be much more complex. Ironically, the enhanced information through social media platforms and big data gives added importance to the traditional diplomatic functions of information analysis and policy prediction.

## Foreign ministries that don't go digital will not survive

- As governments are adapting their structures for international policy management, the jury is still out as to whether digitalization enhances or lessens the significance of the MFA.
- MFAs have no choice but to develop digital strategies if they are to survive. They see themselves challenged in two senses: first in *efficiency* terms, namely their ability to perform functions effectively. Second, in *legitimacy* terms, that is the degree to which their role is acknowledged as valuable and an important component of the 'national diplomatic system'.
- Digitalization further erodes the claim that the MFA is a gatekeeper with privileged access to crucial bodies of information. Digitalization will enhance the need for MFAs to redefine their roles and to develop narratives to explain to their stakeholders and to themselves what they are for.

## Digitalization will accelerate the changing balance between the MFA and its missions

- The impact of early modes of digitalization suggests that the implications will be significant for the relationship between the foreign ministry and diplomatic posts that are taking on more prominent roles. The introduction of secure e-mail already changed the relationships between the MFA and missions, for example in patterns of information distribution and allocation of functions. This will increase dramatically as the implications of new technologies are better understood and exploited.

## How MFAs should *not* respond to the challenges of the digital age

- 'Following the herd' in proclaiming the adoption of digital diplomacy without clearly defining their objectives.
- Treating digital resources as another form of top-down communication rather than developing a policy dialogue with stakeholders.

## The digital strategy checklist for MFA senior management

There is no 'magic bullet'. As with all organisations confronting the challenges of the digital age, each MFA will need to define its own needs and responses in a radically changing environment. Here is our checklist:

- Developing a 'digital profile' which matches functions performed by the MFA and the potential for utilising digital technologies.

- Evaluating key needs and resources in the digital field.
- Promoting supportive internal structures such as digital units.
- Establishing a 'mainstreaming' strategy whereby digitalization percolates throughout the organisation.
- Identifying and/or recruiting 'digital champions'.
- Determining the key skills needed and modes of training to promote them.
- Developing rules for using digital tools and guidelines on risk management.

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