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A POST COLD-WAR WORLD

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"We need a method if we are to investigate the truth of things."¹

This paper examines the art of diplomacy as an instrument of national power and its relevance in a national security strategy for the post cold-war world. A tall order given that there is little consensus on how to best describe the current international environment, nor agreement on what the objectives of our national security strategy should be, or even consensus on the relative value of the traditional elements of national power. To proceed, a conceptual framework or method is needed to help navigate the intellectual shoals of a debate in progress. We can borrow from the German philosopher Hegel² for our framework and apply the tool of the dialectic (the clash of contradictory ideas) to examine diplomacy in the context of Realism and Idealism. This method offers an opportunity to sort through the facts bearing on our subject and compare theory with the actual practice of statecraft.

Idealism

Idealism and its academic predecessor Utopianism hold it possible to harness human creativity (ideas) to transform international society and achieve a more stable and "just" world. Ideas are considered to have a distinct power on par with material elements of power such as military force. Therefore, the idealist believes that the statesman can wield ideas to effect political outcomes;

¹ Descartes, Rene. Rules for the Direction of our Native Intelligence

choice is operative. The genesis of this school of thought was the carnage of World War I. Leaders like President Woodrow Wilson were committed to building international institutions to constrain aggressive states and resolve conflict before it could erupt into war. Idealism in its many incarnations has at its core the central goal of preventing war. In various shades, it also seeks to dilute the sovereignty of the nation-state within a more powerful international structure. The League of Nations was an attempt at such a structure.

Realism

Realism in contrast focuses on the paramount position of the nation-state in international relations. It accepts the possibility of conflict and attempts to describe both the context and the patterns of conflict between nation-states. Realism then is descriptive where idealism is prescriptive. Nation-states behave like individuals and act out of self-interest and from perceptions formed from direct observation. History for the realist is a powerful influence and a source of guidance on what to expect in nation-state relations. The need for a nation-state to act pragmatically and with caution leads us back to the familiar ground of national interest, national security and balance of power politics.

Defining Diplomacy

The substantive difference between the two schools (Realism and Idealism) is demonstrated in defining the art of diplomacy. While there are the inevitable academic variants, in its simplest expression diplomacy is "the art and

² Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1942)

practice of conducting negotiations between nations.”³ In essence diplomacy is communication, but communication with an objective. It has at its center the intent to achieve some purpose and it is in this purpose that our clash of ideas is manifest. The idealist approaches diplomacy as a means to further a particular world-view and might modify the definition to, “the conduct of international relations by negotiation rather than by force.”⁴ A realist in contrast, such as Henry Kissinger (at least as defined by his critics), would make the critical distinction that diplomacy is, “the art of restraining the exercise of power.”⁵ The central difference is the idealists implied goal of the avoidance of the use of force as an end in and of itself, and the realists not so implied statement that behind diplomacy (and the diplomat) lurks the force to compel what diplomacy cannot achieve.

Limits on states actions and what constitutes legitimate goals then, becomes a factor in building the conceptual framework (the international environment) within which diplomacy operates. An idealist would view the use of force as a breach of international norms and could be expected to view such an episode as a failure of the international system and by association, a failure of diplomacy. The realist however would view the escalation from diplomacy to force as a natural progression and expression of relative power between the parties in conflict.

³ Merriam-Webster Dictionary Springfield Mass Merriam-Webster 1974

⁴ Berridge G R, Diplomacy Theory and Practice (London Prentice Hall Harvester Wheatsheaf 1995) 1

⁵ Kissinger Henry A A World Restored Castlereagh Metternich and Restoration of Peace, 1812-1822, (Boston Houghton-Mifflin, 1957), 2

These two contrasting viewpoints represent extremes containing between them a host of other theories. It is my view that the vast majority of these interposing theories, like idealism, are prescriptive rather than descriptive. Realism stands alone in its description of the world without an attempt to attach a vector of movement to some new reality. The world is what it is. Realism describes the stage and leaves to human creativity and imagination the writing of the script. The script can contain a hero and a villain, be tragic in its outcome or comic in its conduct, actors can be major or merely bit players, but they share the same stage and must all deal with the same physical limitations and audience. As a side-note, the realist, contrary to popular myth is not amoral, he can harbor aspirations for a better world just as vibrant as his estranged cousin the idealist. The realist however works within the existing system to achieve his goals, the idealist works to change the system.

I view the instrument of diplomacy in the context of realism, *as a tool of statecraft inseparably linked to crafting the perception of a nation's power (and its will to exercise that power) in the minds of its adversaries, its allies and its own people*. It is therefore tied to the instruments of power and aimed by national interest. It is not itself an element of national power, that is, when separated from interest and metaphorically at rest, it holds no intrinsic value; as compared say, to untapped (but known) natural resources. Paradoxically however, when active it has the potential to act both as catalyst or inhibitor, either synergistically increasing a nation's power out of proportion to the sum of

the individual components of power, or squandering a nation's power and rendering the calculation of relative power difficult. If relative power is misperceived, it can prevent a nation from achieving its interests or make the costs of strategy more costly; the war may be won and the peace lost.

On Environment, Interest and Character

To say one is a realist is not to describe the post cold-war world. Has the world really changed so much that it requires us to reinvent our concept of national power, our policy institutions and our aspirations and expectations in order to navigate the coming years? I think it depends on where you're sitting. To the vast majority of the world's people very little has changed. Ask the refugees of the various conflicts embedded in the context of the cold-war, the Angola's, Nicaragua's, and Lebanon's if their world was more stable and peaceful when the world was perceived to be in a bilateral balance of power. The fall of the Berlin wall and the subsequent turmoil in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union definitely marks a transition to a new act, but the stage remains unchanged. If anything, the star has exited the stage (for the moment, although we intellectually know he is just off stage holding 20,000 nuclear weapons) allowing us time to notice the performances of the supporting actors that were there all the time but overshadowed by our concentration on the main players.

The United States stands defined by our value system, a diverse population, our unique geographic circumstance, and a culture shaped by history and experience. We have not changed much in two hundred plus years, as

evidenced by the similarity of the issues and arguments first articulated by the founding fathers and still under debate today pertaining to our relationship to and with the world beyond our borders. I would argue that our national interests have remained, and will remain, relatively static based as they are on our national self-image and character. Preservation of our political institutions and territorial integrity, protection of our citizens, and pursuit of economic security will remain the central features in our calculation of interests

Separate from interest but just as important, are those attributes of character that tend to shape our interactions in the world. Americans are aggressive and independent; we like to be out front and to solve problems. The decline of the Soviet Union has freed our natural inclination to be more involved in the world. Americans are rediscovering the world beyond our borders. It is this rediscovery, amplified by the visual impact of CNN and the compression of time by modern transportation and communication technology that has stressed our traditional policy making institutions. It is difficult for Americans, once aware of a situation, not to project American involvement in the resolution of whatever crisis is occurring. Single interest groups can capture the attention of political leaders and drive the nation towards engagement without a prerequisite finding that our national interests are at stake. In short, the concept of national interest, while valuable in deliberate policy formulation is not sufficient to predict American behavior in a response to crisis.

CHAPTER TWO

DIPLOMACY

We have a recent event that illustrates the complexity of diplomacy; the 20 August 1998 attacks on the pharmaceutical factory in Sudan and alleged terrorist training camps in Afghanistan. In this example we see the wide range of levels in which diplomacy is practiced.

Policy versus Execution

It is important to distinguish between the processes that formulate diplomatic objectives as part of a national strategy. Policy has two main origins; policy derived from a deliberate planning process and that born out of reaction to crisis. We are generally familiar with the deliberate process. Political leaders run on platforms that include foreign policy objectives they believe are good for the country and will be supported by the American public. Interagency relationships, bureaucratic decision-making and the personalities of key officials also contribute to the official foreign policy objectives of the United States. Deliberate policy formulation is predictable in its need to craft consensus among a wide range of interest groups and dovetail its objectives (ends) into the complex budgetary mechanisms (means) of the federal government. In the case of Sudan, the deliberate policy process placed Sudan on the list of nations supporting terrorism and imposed a range of economic and political penalties in reaction to their support for terrorist groups.

Formulation of policy, or the modification of policy in the face of crisis is a more fluid and unpredictable process. Unfettered from most of the normal political and practical checks and balances, the need to take effective action can lead to dramatic and sweeping policy change. In the case of Sudan, while it could be argued we have long articulated a strong stand against terrorism, the launching of ten's of cruise missiles at a sovereign state who we are not at war with is clearly a departure from normal practice and represents a crisis reaction. It should be noted that while some policy goals may be public (protect Americans, deny terrorists safehaven, hold states harboring terrorists accountable), the implementing strategy that contains those goals (and most likely other goals) will remain secret. This points to the first challenge of the diplomat, to carry out the diplomatic mission on both the private and public stage and prosecute both overt and covert strategic objectives.

Levels of Diplomacy

Diplomacy therefore takes place on several levels. There are the everyday continuous functions of diplomacy that most Americans think of when they think about an embassy; consular services, political reporting, and basic representation to a Host Nation. In a military context we would call these functions continuing actions. These responsibilities exist independent of our specific relationship or agenda with the host nation and will not undergo major modification in response to crisis or a change in American political leadership.

Public diplomacy is just that, public. It spans the range of press releases and communiqués, attendance by diplomatic personnel at conferences and social occasions, and the presence of our most senior civilian leaders at summits designed to showcase relationships and political accomplishments. It is the overt representation of our foreign policy and the “official face” of America presented overseas.

Private diplomacy in contrast is in many ways the most valuable level of diplomacy. It recognizes the importance of personal relationships and the probability that in a one-on-one situation, removed from the influence of staffs and the press, two leaders or diplomats may forge an understanding upon which public diplomacy may flourish. Private diplomacy occurs everyday and everywhere that America has representation. It serves as a counterbalance and adjunct to the assessments of the national intelligence community and gives policy makers in Washington a feel for the “possible.” In the case of Sudan our ability to benefit from personal diplomacy was severely constrained by our closure of diplomatic missions in Sudan and the withdrawal of envoys. It is difficult to play a hand if you aren’t sitting at the table.

Orientation

While labeling the world as unipolar or multipolar is of limited use, in the case of describing diplomacy there is value in making the distinction between bilateral, multilateral and for lack of a better term, global orientations in diplomatic conduct.

Bilateral relations, the interactions between two parties, are the oldest of diplomatic orientations and still characterize a good deal of our diplomatic conduct. This is especially true with our closest allies and most intense enemies, those relations where we do not want the interference of third parties no matter how well intended.

Multilateral relations, interactions between more than two parties can have several origins. Alliances or coalitions are one example of multilateral relations and are generally formed against something or someone. Issue based multilateralism is increasing in importance as nations recognize common goals it is in their best interests to address in a wider context; regional trade is one such example.

Finally, global orientation occurs in reference to issues that effect virtually all governments; the preeminent example is the global environment. However, as communications technologies continue to shrink our perception of what is local and what is global it is likely that global diplomacy will become a larger player in our international interactions.

Time

Time has been touched on already and is clearly a factor that drives crisis diplomacy, it is a scarce resource, finite and with no suitable substitute. Since time is a finite resource it must be managed, not only in the traditional sense of allocating time for tasks and setting time goals for long range objectives, but also for the management of perceptions. Diplomacy can be thought of as

occurring on three different time scales. Normal time, associated with the routine and continuing actions described earlier and the interagency formulation of policy in the deliberate setting. Crisis time, where actions appear to have accelerated and where delays are perceived to exert a disproportional cost to the effective resolution of the crisis. Finally, there is a transitional period where time perceptions are oscillating as the immediacy of the crisis recedes and the policy process begins to transform crisis decisions into deliberate policy

The phenomenon of time perception is a key element in diplomacy. We seek to rationalize our own perception, keeping it in perspective to our goals and overall situation, while attempting to distort our opponents time sense to drive negotiations to completion on our terms. It is here that the psychological tools of ambiguity and uncertainty find their niche

Summary

American diplomacy must reconcile itself to representing a society that celebrates diversity, encourages domestic political discourse, has enduring national interests to protect, and has the resources to indulge its natural predilections to be a player on the world stage in matters other than its vital interests. I would hesitate to label the world in which diplomacy acts as unipolar, multipolar or bilateral in its character, nor do I find it useful. The world landscape is one in which the United States enjoys unusual freedom and this freedom brings both opportunity and risk. It is our interactions with other actors (nation-state, transnational, or even individuals) that must be correctly

understood for diplomacy to contribute to a successful grand strategy. At times our interactions will be narrowly focused towards a single actor with little bleed over into the sphere of other actors, at other times regional approaches designed for simultaneous engagement will be preferred.

Diplomacy communicates not only our intentions in regard to specific issues and crises; it declares the aspirations and expectations of the American people. Implicit behind its message is the full might and power of the United States. If policy is crafted well and the instruments of national power synchronized towards the same objective, the chances for diplomacy to succeed in persuading its target (friend or foe) are great. In the event that the cost of diplomacy (in time, risk, or resources) exceeds the threshold of acceptability, then strategy must provide for the application of other means to achieve the ends specified by policy. When this occurs, and history teaches this will be more often than not, diplomacy does not cease to participate because threat of force or the actual application of force has occurred, diplomacy remains engaged and reinforces the instrument in play.