

Distinctive Characteristics of American Diplomacy

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Received: 23 March 2011; revised: 1 August 2011; accepted: 3 August 2011

Summary

My central claim is that the United States has conducted a distinctive form of 'anti-diplomacy', accepting in practice many diplomatic norms and practices while remaining reluctant to acknowledge the fact. To support this claim, this article argues that since its rise as a world power, the United States has participated in international society's diplomatic culture in a distinctive way and that this distinctiveness stems from seven interconnected characteristics of American diplomacy: (1) America's long-held distrust and negative view of diplomats and diplomacy, which has contributed to the historical neglect and sidelining of the US Department of State in the United States' policy-making process; (2) a high degree of domestic influence over foreign policy and diplomacy; (3) a tendency to privilege hard power over soft power in foreign policy; (4) a preference for bilateral over multilateral diplomacy; (5) an ideological tradition of diplomatically isolating states that are considered adversarial and of refusing to engage them until they meet preconditions; (6) a tradition of appointing a relatively high proportion of political rather than career ambassadors; and (7) a demonstrably strong cultural disposition towards a direct, low-context negotiating style. A consequence of these distinguishing characteristics is that American diplomacy tends to be less effective than it might otherwise be, not only in advancing the United States' own interests, but also in advancing wider international cooperation. A goal here is to provide a working framework with which to evaluate any US administration's relationship to diplomacy as the country's interests and identity evolve.

Keywords

American diplomacy, diplomatic culture, bilateral diplomacy, multilateral diplomacy, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, soft power, negotiating style

Introduction

In the Structural Realist and other positivist conceptions of international relations, diplomats are generally assumed to be more or less alike, with no meaningful differences in style or substance. In other words, all individuals who represent their sovereign state's interests in the international system do so in essentially the same manner and with more or less the same level of skill. I disagree with this

*) The author wishes to thank Paul Sharp and three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

view, instead positing that within a broad diplomatic culture that shapes the behaviour of all diplomats, there are in fact perceptible and meaningful differences in the way that individual states conduct themselves 'diplomatically'.¹ Moreover, I think that US diplomatic practices are distinct from those of other countries. By this I am not suggesting that American diplomacy is *unique*, since the United States shares many aspects of its diplomatic style and substance with other states in the international system, but rather that its characteristics are *distinctive* and therefore make a difference in international relations.

One of the difficulties of making an argument about the distinctiveness of American diplomacy is that the United States' dominance as a world power since 1945 makes it hard to find countries against which American diplomacy can be meaningfully measured. The Cold War-era Soviet Union might serve, but the fact that the USSR was a largely totalitarian superpower and that the United States is a largely liberal-democratic superpower severely constrains the comparison. Another approach might be to compare American diplomacy with other hegemony in world history, such as Britain in the nineteenth century or imperial Rome. In the contemporary world, we could compare American diplomacy with that of the other four permanent members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council — Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France. And yet even here, it seems hardly reasonable to compare the diplomacy of the United States with that of an authoritarian China or a struggling democracy such as Russia. As Western liberal great powers, the United Kingdom and France are plausible comparables, but here the power differential (whether strategic, economic, or socio-cultural) between each of these countries and the United States is significant. And if we were to take the comparative analysis to the extreme, weighing the diplomatic culture, style and practices of the United States against those of all members of the international system — the other 192 current UN members — the power differentials would become even greater. Perhaps these difficulties go some way towards explaining why this kind of analysis appears so rarely. Moreover, the widely accepted theory of US exceptionalism reinforces the problem of finding comparables. The logic here is that the United States is so different from all other countries that its diplomatic practices must also be different. If the United States is an exceptional country that conducts itself internationally in an exceptional manner, does it not follow that American diplomacy will be similarly exceptional?

¹ On diplomatic culture, see Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1977); James Der Derian, 'Hedley Bull and the Idea of Diplomatic Culture', in Rick Fawn and Jeremy Larkins (eds.), *International Society after the Cold War: Anarchy and Order Reconsidered* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996); Geoffrey Wiseman, 'Pax Americana: Bumping into Diplomatic Culture', *International Studies Perspectives*, vol. 6, no. 4, November 2005, pp. 409-430; and Iver B. Neumann, 'Sustainability and Transformation in Diplomatic Culture', in Costas M. Constantinou and James Der Derian (eds.), *Sustainable Diplomacies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 128-147.

Generally, the literature on American diplomacy has paid insufficient attention to whether or not American diplomacy is as exceptional as the United States is often presented as being.² So why are we interested in this question now? To be sure, diplomats from other countries have long been interested in the question and have views on it. The memoirs and writings of many diplomats contain numerous references to national diplomatic styles. And one notable contribution comes from British diplomat Harold Nicolson, who provided us with many insights on different nations' diplomatic styles and methods (although in doing so, he flirted with the danger of drifting into national stereotyping, something inappropriate to our modern sensibilities).³ Among scholars, Raymond Cohen is a rare example of a writer who has given sustained attention to the exceptionality of American diplomacy. In the early 1990s, Cohen's *Negotiating Across Cultures* was successful in describing how national cultural differences explain diplomatic behaviour and outcomes.⁴ Cohen's work was a major publication in a multi-year series of studies by the United States Institute of Peace on national negotiating styles — for example, French, German and Iranian. The most recent publication in that series (and most pertinent for this article) is a 2010 volume entitled *American Negotiating Behavior*.⁵

While it is tempting to think that the United States — as a hegemon — has little need of diplomacy, I suggest that the United States — whether viewed as a still-dominant hegemon or one on the decline — has nonetheless participated in the diplomatic culture of international society and has diplomats who in many ways conform to most of that society's diplomatic practices.⁶ After all, the United States has a Department of State (the American name for a ministry of foreign affairs), maintains a large foreign service at embassies around the world that are

² Note that I am referring here to a relatively narrow literature, not more general works on US foreign policy, which — in the US case — often focus on presidents and blur the foreign policy–diplomacy distinction that I am seeking, for analytical purposes, to sharpen. For an elaboration of my views on the distinction, see Geoffrey Wiseman, 'Engaging the Enemy: An Essential Norm for Sustainable US Diplomacy', in Costas M. Constantinou and James Der Derian (eds.), *Sustainable Diplomacies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), esp. pp. 214-215. For an extensive treatment of why many US scholars ignore the distinction, see David Clinton's contribution to this issue: D. Clinton, 'The Distinction between Foreign Policy and Diplomacy in American International Thought and Practice', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 6, nos. 3-4, 2011, pp. 261-276.

³ I am grateful to Paul Sharp for this latter point. See Harold Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (London: Oxford University Press, [1939] 1969), esp. ch. 5.

⁴ Raymond Cohen, *Negotiating Across Cultures: Communication Obstacles in International Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, [1991] 2002).

⁵ Richard H. Solomon and Nigel Quinney, *American Negotiating Behavior: Wheeler-Dealers, Legal Eagles, Bullies, and Preachers* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2010). In addition to this volume, USIP has published a dozen books on cross-cultural studies.

⁶ Paul Sharp argues in this special issue of *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* ('Obama, Clinton and the Diplomacy of Change,' pp. 393-411), that the United States should no longer be viewed as a hegemon and that this is a big reason for the salience of diplomacy these days. There is a lot to this claim. For the view that even as a hegemon the United States needed (and used) diplomacy, see Wiseman, 'Pax Americana', pp. 409-430.

headed by ambassadors, maintains consulates promoting US business and protecting US citizens, and belongs to and has large missions at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the UN and other international organizations.

My central claim is that the United States has conducted a distinctive form of 'anti-diplomacy', accepting in practice many diplomatic norms and practices while remaining reluctant to acknowledge the fact.⁷ To support this claim, this article argues that the United States participates in international society's diplomatic culture in a distinctive way and that this distinctiveness stems from seven interconnected characteristics of American diplomacy: (1) America's long-held distrust and negative view of diplomats and diplomacy, which has contributed to the historical neglect and sidelining of the State Department in the US policy-making process; (2) a high degree of domestic influence over foreign policy and diplomacy; (3) a tendency to privilege hard power over soft power in foreign policy; (4) a preference for bilateral over multilateral diplomacy; (5) an ideological tradition of diplomatically isolating states that are considered adversarial and of refusing to engage them until they meet preconditions; (6) a tradition of appointing a relatively high proportion of political rather than career ambassadors; and (7) a demonstrably strong cultural disposition towards a direct, low-context negotiating style. Since the United States' rise as a major player in international relations roughly a century ago, not all of these characteristics that make American diplomacy distinctive have been present at all times and in equal measure.⁸

These distinguishing characteristics of American diplomacy were extended and reinterpreted by George W. Bush's administration, which was widely criticized by the international community for doing so. And the Obama administration, during its first two years, moved quickly in both word and deed to offer its own counter-interpretation of how America will conduct itself diplomatically. There is, arguably, an American conception of diplomacy, and it is currently evolving and clearly contested. This article's goal is not to adjudicate on the Bush and Obama administrations as other articles in this special issue do, but — through analysis of the distinct characteristics of American diplomacy — to provide a working framework for evaluating any US administration's relationship to diplomacy. The larger purpose, then, is to show that these characteristics, or 'qualities', amount to, and help explain, a view of diplomacy that is negative and critical at the declaratory level, yet accepting at the substantive level.

⁷ For a different and pioneering post-structuralist approach, see James Der Derian, *Antidiplomacy: Spies, Terror, Speed, and War* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992). I am particularly grateful to one anonymous reviewer for urging me to highlight this theme.

⁸ I am conscious that lists of this sort can produce a certain amount of debate, even controversy. Here, I offer my list in the spirit of provoking scholarly discussion. Other possible distinguishing characteristics that I have considered but did not include in my list for now are: (a) a strong US commitment to public diplomacy, a concept coined in the 1960s by an American, Edmund Gullion; and (b) a commitment to the idea of near-universal diplomatic representation.

A General, Long-Held Distrust and Negative View of Diplomacy

The United States has a history of distrusting the institution of diplomacy — including the key idea of being represented abroad by a separate class of trained professional diplomats — in ways that set it apart from other nations. This distrust, evident in countless comments by such early political figures as Thomas Jefferson, who thought that an ‘independent America’ would have no need for diplomats other than commercial consuls,⁹ was reinforced by nineteenth-century US isolationism and neutrality. Thus, as Thomas Hanson notes in his contribution to this special issue of *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, in 1901 the Department of State consisted of 82 personnel at home, with less than 70 diplomats abroad at only 35 diplomatic missions, but a much larger number of consulates.¹⁰ Two practical historical examples arguably further illustrate the point. First, the first American to hold the rank of ambassador abroad was Thomas Bayard, a former Secretary of State under President Grover Cleveland, who was appointed to the Court of St James in 1893. Of significance here is that for over 100 years after independence, the senior US diplomat abroad carried the rank of minister, lower than that of ambassador, a title that was ‘associated with European royalty’.¹¹ This was also done in part for reasons of thrift, but the end result was that the senior US diplomat in a foreign capital was accorded lesser precedence in protocol terms, thus lowering his access and therefore his effectiveness. Second, the first US president to make an overseas visit as an incumbent was Theodore Roosevelt, in 1906, and his visit was to nearby Panama. In other words, the United States appointed its first ambassador 117 years after independence, and 130 years passed before the first official presidential visit occurred.¹²

This historical distrust of diplomacy and the United States’ unwillingness to embrace diplomatic norms openly, such as sending ambassadors to other countries, explains the relatively early neglect and sidelining of the State Department in the policy-making process.¹³ While suspicion of career diplomats is very

⁹ For this and other early examples of negative views towards diplomacy, see Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), pp. 23-24.

¹⁰ For a history of the US foreign service from independence to 1960 that includes details of the number of diplomatic and consular posts in certain years, see William Barnes and John Heath Morgan, *The Foreign Service of the United States: Origins, Development and Functions* (Washington DC: Historical Office, Bureau of Public Affairs, US Department of State, 1961), for example appendix 4, pp. 349-350.

¹¹ George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: US Foreign Relations since 1776* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 3.

¹² For a discussion of Theodore Roosevelt’s role as an innovative shaper of US foreign relations and his ‘diplomatic subtletness’, see Serge Ricard, ‘Theodore Roosevelt: Imperialist or Global Strategist in the New Expansionist Age?’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2008, pp. 639-657. The quote is on p. 644. Also see Evan Thomas, *The War Lovers: Roosevelt, Lodge, Hearst and the Rush to Empire, 1898* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2010).

¹³ On the historical waxing and waning of the United States’ diplomatic effectiveness, see Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 7th edition 2005), p. 548.

evident in many democratic systems, where political and bureaucratic players have challenged foreign ministries, this occurred much earlier and more potently in the United States and is therefore a distinguishing feature of American diplomacy, impacting the perception and effectiveness of diplomats in the field. As noted above, the United States had a strong commercially oriented consular service in the nineteenth century, but a small and weak foreign service at the turn of the twentieth century. The 1924 Rogers (or Foreign Service) Act represented a major shift and effort to rectify this state of affairs, creating a professional foreign service, the early fruits of which included superb professional diplomats such as George Kennan.

Yet even as the United States put its isolationist past behind it and assumed great power status in the early part of the twentieth century and then superpower status following the Second World War — at which point it fully entered and in fact helped produce the bipolar diplomatic world known as the Cold War — at least two factors ensured that the United States' distant and ambivalent relationship to the norms of diplomatic culture would continue. One factor was that Cold War bipolarity and nuclear deterrence superseded many traditional diplomatic skills and knowledge requirements. It can thus be said that US strategists and game theorists led the country through the nuclear Cold War, not US diplomats serving at embassies around the world. This factor was in turn reflected in the post-war dominance of academic Realism, which became closely associated with strategic studies and grand strategy rather than diplomatic history. These academic developments reflected the perceived powerlessness of diplomacy as practised by the State Department and the ascendancy of the National Security Council (NSC), the Pentagon, and the intelligence community, notably the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The idea of grand strategy — with its connotations of military force, means–ends calculus, and the need to organize all of the state's resources in one direction — thus dominated the national security discourse, weakening diplomacy as a tool of statecraft. A second, related factor was that the rise of post-war US power led the United States to develop an extensive network of military bases and facilities around the world, leading to the question of who exactly represented the United States abroad: the senior US military commander; the CIA station chief; or the ambassador?¹⁴

As argued further below, while domestic politics clearly influence foreign policy in all states, especially democracies, as a general proposition the State Department was fighting for policy influence and 'gatekeeping' prerogatives much sooner

¹⁴ As a formal, constitutional matter, the ambassador, or chief of mission, is the president's official US government representative to a foreign country or international organization. The secretary of state is generally regarded as being responsible for coordination of all the US government's activities abroad. The CIA station chief is required to keep the ambassador fully informed on intelligence operations, and the senior military commander stationed in a foreign country is also required to consult and coordinate with the ambassador.

than other foreign ministries, a fight that can be dated to the 1947 National Security Act, which *inter alia* established the NSC.¹⁵ Unlike what occurred in other countries, however, the bureaucratic challenge in the United States was institutionalized to the State Department's disadvantage.

The historical distrust of diplomacy by US political leaders has been underscored by the neglect and even denigration of diplomats in American culture itself.¹⁶ With only a few minor exceptions, (professional) US diplomats do not capture the popular imagination, and the anecdotal evidence suggests that foreign-service careers do not hold the same appeal for younger Americans as they do for the young in most Western countries. The United States' political and popular cultures permit few hero-diplomats. Political leaders acting in diplomatic capacities usually take the limelight (for most Americans, this is appropriate), and the role of diplomats is usually only acknowledged years later. Take, for example, Robert McNamara's 1999 description of US Ambassador to Moscow Llewellyn 'Tommy' Thompson as 'the unsung hero' of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.¹⁷ The United States relies extensively on diplomacy and diplomats, but has trouble acknowledging the fact.¹⁸

The idea that Americans distrust diplomacy and diplomats is, of course, a general claim requiring qualification: US conservatives tend to be more suspicious of diplomacy than are US liberals.¹⁹ Even so, there is an international tradition in the Republican Party that includes Richard Nixon and George H.W. Bush, but the conventional view of the George W. Bush administration is that it conformed to a neo-conservative ideology reflective of a general conservative doubt about diplomacy. That administration, notably in its first term, contributed to the repeated scepticism of diplomacy, denigrating diplomacy and, to suit its purposes,

¹⁵ Some have dated the State Department's modern sidelining to Franklin Roosevelt's presidency; for example, see J. Simon Rofe, *Franklin Roosevelt's Foreign Policy and the Welles Mission* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). On 'gatekeeping', see Brian Hocking, 'Catalytic Diplomacy: Beyond "Newness" and "Decline"', in Jan Melissen (ed.), *Innovation in Diplomatic Practice* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 21-42.

¹⁶ For example, see Newt Gingrich, 'Rogue State Department', *Foreign Policy*, July-August 2003, pp. 42-48. For a scholarly account, see S.W. Hook, 'Domestic Obstacles to International Affairs: The State Department Under Fire at Home', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 2003, pp. 23-29.

¹⁷ Robert McNamara, J.G. Blight and R.K. Brigham, *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1999), p. 429.

¹⁸ Recent support for this observation can be seen in the general public reaction to the 2010 public disclosure of some 250,000 classified US diplomatic cables by the open source advocacy organization WikiLeaks. Spokesmen for the organization and the administration's critics asserted that the leaks were justified on the grounds that the leaked cables revealed extensive duplicity by Hillary Clinton and by US diplomats reporting from the field. However, other observers, such as Fareed Zakaria, commented on how the cables showed US diplomats actually doing a generally good job at representing US interests abroad; see Fareed Zakaria, 'WikiLeaks Shows the Skills of US Diplomats', *Time*, 2 December 2010. Also see Paul W. Schroeder, 'The Secret Lives of Nations', *New York Times*, 2 December 2010.

¹⁹ This, in itself, might be regarded as exceptional. Elsewhere, the liberal/left tends to distrust diplomats and conservatives tend to be attracted to them (a notable exception being Margaret Thatcher in the UK). I owe this point to Paul Sharp.

reducing diplomacy to the status of appeasement by another name. In contrast, US President Barack Obama, as several articles in this collection testify, came to office promising that diplomacy would be given far greater weight under his administration, and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has improved the State Department's political profile and won some support for it. On the evidence of Obama's first two years, he has resisted the United States' traditional distrust of diplomacy and the conservative reinforcing of that tradition.

Domestic Politics' Higher Influence over Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

The second characteristic of American diplomacy — one that is widely commented upon by non-Americans — is the relatively high degree of influence that domestic politics has on the United States' formulation of foreign policy and thus on the conduct of diplomacy by US political leaders and the diplomats that are posted around the world. This is not to suggest by any means that domestic politics does not play an increasingly important role in other polities, especially democracies. But scholars and practitioners alike are in general agreement that the US Congress is relatively more influential and actively involved in US foreign policy and diplomacy than are comparable legislatures in the Western world. As Solomon and Quinney argue in *American Negotiating Behavior*, 'the American Congress probably has greater influence on foreign policy than any other legislature in the world'.²⁰ This article is not the place to explore why this is so, but it seems clear that such issues as geographic isolation, the constitutional separation of powers, the resultant fragmented inter-agency process, influential diasporas, and the long period of foreign policy isolation are all contributory factors (see, for example, the articles elsewhere in this issue by Freeman and Hanson).²¹

Another way of making the argument that domestic politics has a relatively high degree of influence over the formulation of US foreign policy is to draw on Hamilton and Langhorne's definition of diplomacy as 'the peaceful conduct of relations amongst political entities, their principals and accredited agents'.²² As discussed above, Americans have a historical legacy of distrusting diplomacy in general and diplomats in particular. However, as the United States slowly accepted that it could not realistically avoid diplomatic engagement with the world, Americans showed themselves to be much more comfortable with the idea of being

²⁰ Solomon and Quinney, *American Negotiating Behavior*, p. 130. This book provides many examples in support of this claim.

²¹ See also Solomon and Quinney, *American Negotiating Behavior*, p. 134; Chas. W. Freeman Jr, 'The Incapacitation of US Statecraft and Diplomacy,' *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 6, nos. 3-4, 2011, pp. 413-432; and in the same issue on pages 433-450, Thomas Hanson, 'The Traditions and Travails of Career Diplomacy in the United States.'

²² Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its Evolution, Theory and Administration* (London: Routledge, 2nd edition, 2011), p. 1.

represented abroad by their *principals* (democratically elected or appointed political figures) rather than their *accredited agents* (professionally trained diplomats).

Although Americans tend to see this approach as a strength of both US democracy and US foreign relations, many non-Americans (and indeed some Americans) have regarded this approach as a hindrance to diplomacy, or as a card that is ritually played by US negotiators. Writing about the advent of a new diplomacy after the First World War, Nicolson argued that the key factor explaining the shift from the *old diplomacy* (based on secret and shifting alliances that were intended to manage the European balance of power) to the *new diplomacy* (based on open covenants that are, in US President Woodrow Wilson's famous phrase, 'openly arrived at' and operating in new multilateral institutions) was 'the belief that it was possible to apply to the conduct of *external* affairs, the ideas and practices which, in the conduct of *internal* affairs, had for generations been regarded as the essentials of liberal democracy'.²³ Only the Americans took the domestic analogy that far. While the old–new diplomacy dichotomy has its limitations as an analytical device and guide to policy, new diplomacy was generally taken to mean that diplomacy should be more open to public scrutiny (reflecting Wilsonian and American ideas), in contrast to the old way of conducting diplomacy secretly and out of the public gaze. The Paris Peace Conference in 1919 made it clear, however, that — for Wilson — diplomatic negotiations were to be conducted in private and their outcomes only subsequently made public. Moreover, Wilson's attempts to have US membership in the League of Nations endorsed failed in 1920 when the US Senate declined to ratify the Treaty of Versailles — perhaps the most famous early twentieth-century example of domestic politics determining foreign policy and in the process heavily constraining American diplomacy.²⁴

This denial also represented another dramatic shift for diplomacy. The fact that a legislature could refuse to ratify an international treaty that had been negotiated by its chief executive 'in person' not only humiliated Wilson, but also set in process a new intrusion of domestic politics into the foreign policies of many countries. There has been a high degree of emulation and acceptance of the ratification process worldwide since 1919, and it should be noted that the United States' constitutional provisions mentioned above are especially strict. In consequence, ratification can be seen as the direct and democratic involvement of 'the people', or at least their representatives, in foreign policy and diplomacy. Similarly, the US Senate's constitutional right to approve all of the president's ambassadorial nominees brings the Senate and — again arguably — the people closer to managing the United States' diplomacy (a theme developed in the discussion of the sixth characteristic, below). And, as argued in Hanson's contribution to this special

²³ Nicolson, *Diplomacy*, p. 113; emphasis in original.

²⁴ For an argument that the final vote was in fact quite close and that Wilson could have won ratification if he had shown more flexibility on accepting reservations, see Thomas Bailey, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal* (New York: Macmillan, 1945), pp. 166-167 and 266-270.

issue, the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal reinforced congressional oversight of foreign policy in the 1970s. On the other hand, the growth of summit diplomacy between the leaders of the United States and the USSR during parts of the Cold War, notably on strategic nuclear issues, helped to maintain a certain degree of presidential dominance over foreign policy and diplomacy.²⁵ In general, however, US congressional practice in the twentieth century responded to growing public demands for a more open and putatively democratic diplomacy. In addition, and reflecting the American view that if diplomacy is to be tolerated, then it should be as democratic and accountable as possible, there is a relatively strong sentiment in favour of public diplomacy — the idea of seeking to address or influence foreign publics directly, not just governments (for a full exposition on public diplomacy, see Bruce Gregory's contribution to this issue).²⁶

Nicolson's observation that the United States seems to take the domestic analogy much more seriously than do other nations is reinforced by what a number of diplomats and at least one scholar have said. Several ambassadors to the United States, such as Canada's Allan Gotlieb during Ronald Reagan's presidency in the 1980s, have commented on how diplomats posted to Washington DC do not restrict their work to, or even do most of their work through, the US State Department, but instead work with and through the myriad players on Capitol Hill and the United States' relatively complex and fragmented inter-agency process, which serves to reinforce the influence of domestic politics. In Gotlieb's words, a foreign ambassador in Washington 'is accredited neither to a government nor even to a system. He is accredited to an unstable mass of people, forces, and interests that are constantly shifting, aligning, and realigning in ways that can affect or damage the interests of the country he represents'.²⁷ Gotlieb's job was not so much to represent Canadian interests to the traditional, responsible agencies in Washington, especially the State Department, but to lobby and influence the making of US policy. In other words, diplomats no longer do business with the State Department; their business is with a multitude of political actors, especially the US Congress. In Robert Wolfe's phrase, diplomats become 'actors in domestic politics'.²⁸ A good example of how diplomats have adjusted to the nature of US politics and the many influences on it is how countries such as Canada and Australia have appointed high-level diplomats specifically for congressional advocacy.

²⁵ On summit diplomacy, see David H. Dunn (ed.), *Diplomacy at the Highest Level: The Evolution of International Summitry* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

²⁶ Bruce Gregory, 'American Public Diplomacy: Enduring Characteristics, Elusive Transformation', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 6, nos. 3-4, 2011, pp. 351-372, this issue.

²⁷ Allan Gotlieb, *I'll Be With You in a Minute, Mr Ambassador: The Education of a Canadian Diplomat in Washington* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 30-31.

²⁸ Robert Wolfe, 'Still Lying Abroad? On the Institution of the Resident Ambassador', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, vol. 9, no. 2, July 1998, p. 39. Wolfe provides a good account of Gotlieb's experience on pp. 38-39. Others noted this trend as early as the 1950s; see Robert Murphy, *Diplomat Among Warriors* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1965), p. 450.

Alan Henrikson takes this argument one intriguing step further, arguing that diplomats as a whole, not just those posted to Washington, are adjusting to a world in which international relations are conducted along the lines of US domestic politics, with lobbying and advocacy being core diplomatic tasks.²⁹ In other words, we may be witnessing the ‘Americanization’ of world diplomacy. By this, Henrikson means not that the United States conducts its diplomacy differently and distinctively (as this article claims), but that because US diplomacy is heavily influenced by domestic politics and because the United States’ influence on international relations is transcendent, its influence shapes how diplomacy is now conducted. According to this argument, diplomats emulate US domestic politics, not US diplomacy — the exception becomes the rule.

A Tendency to Privilege Hard Power over Soft Power in Foreign Policy

A third distinguishing feature of modern American diplomacy is that US administrations as a whole tend to privilege hard power policies over soft power policies. With the United States’ growing sense of itself as a world power after the Second World War, grand strategy and foreign policy came to be based more on raw military and economic power and less on diplomatic skill and persuasion and a reliance on the United States’ soft power of attraction.³⁰ In some ways, this is understandable, as by 1945 what would later become known as soft power was widely thought to be either ineffective or non-existent, given the lesson of the 1930s that military force was the only way to stop aggressive dictators. As already argued, within the early Cold War context, the creation of the NSC apparatus in 1947 was key to this development. The creation of a national security system in the early Cold War years gave a relatively higher public and bureaucratic platform for non-diplomats — or what might be termed anti-diplomats — in the powerful military and intelligence communities.³¹

During the Cold War era, the ‘United States as superpower’ was often criticized for a perceived proclivity to go to war — for example, in Vietnam, Panama and Grenada. In the post-11 September 2001 context, the enthusiasm of George W. Bush’s administration for the use of military force, notably against Afghanistan and then Iraq, reinforced this perception in countries such as China

²⁹ Alan K. Henrikson, ‘Diplomacy’s Possible Futures’, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2006, esp. pp. 20-26.

³⁰ I am using *soft power* here fairly narrowly, taking it to be roughly synonymous with *diplomacy* or *diplomatic persuasion*. As developed by Joseph S. Nye, soft power is a broader concept, involving cooption rather than coercion and drawing on a country’s culture, political values and foreign policies; see Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

³¹ For the views of a former US diplomat, see David D. Newsom, *Diplomacy and the American Democracy* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), esp. chapters 11 and 12.

(as CHEN Zhimin's contribution to this issue shows).³² President Barack Obama's decisions to withdraw all combat troops from Iraq in 2010 and to begin a similar withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2011 implied that some kind of balance between force and diplomacy was being sought. But Obama was criticized by some in his own Democratic base for not moving quickly enough on withdrawals, and some even suggested that he was not all that different from his predecessor.³³ The Obama administration's irresistible temptations to intervene militarily in the Libyan crisis of 2011 added some weight to this view. Still, Secretary of State Clinton conceptualized US foreign policy as 'civilian power', consisting of three components: defence; diplomacy; and development.³⁴

In Joseph Nye's now famous distinction, the hard power agents of brute force in the US Defense Department eclipsed the soft power agents of diplomatic persuasion in the US State Department. This reliance on hard power — the military, intelligence, special forces and sanctions — produced a strong national security culture in US diplomacy, which is arguably stronger than in most comparable democracies. Hard power should not necessarily be equated solely with coercion, as it can also be expressed in defensive and justifiable forms. However, several authors have variously characterized the United States as a 'garrison state', a 'warrior state' (see Michael Smith's contribution to this issue),³⁵ and as a state conducting a militarized foreign policy.³⁶ In a related viewpoint, Allison Stanger has argued that the United States has become 'one nation under contract', by which she means that the United States has outsourced its foreign policy to private-sector actors that are closely connected to the military complex.³⁷ What is striking about these views about militarization, hard power and outsourcing is that they are being made not by radical critics (such as Noam Chomsky), but by scholars, journalists, war veterans and diplomats, suggesting that they are receiving a high degree of mainstream acceptance.

³² CHEN Zhimin, 'US Diplomacy and Diplomats: A Chinese View', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 6, nos. 3-4, 2011, pp. 277-297.

³³ For a journalistic example of this argument, see Ross Douthat, 'Whose Foreign Policy Is It?', *New York Times*, 8 May 2011.

³⁴ Hillary Rodham Clinton, 'Leading Through Civilian Power: Redefining American Diplomacy and Development', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 89, no. 6, November/December 2010, pp. 13-24.

³⁵ Michael Smith, 'European Responses to US Diplomacy: "Special Relationships", Transatlantic Governance and World Order', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 6 nos. 3-4, pp. 299-317.

³⁶ On the idea of a garrison state, see A.L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America's Anti-Statism and its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); on a warrior state, see Michael Smith, 'Between Two Worlds? The European Union, the United States and World Order', *International Politics*, vol. 41, 2004, pp. 95-117. On militarism in US foreign policy, see Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); J. Anthony Holmes, 'Where are the Civilians? How to Rebuild the US Foreign Service', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 88, no. 1, January/February 2009, pp. 148-160; and William Pfaff, 'Manufacturing Insecurity: How Militarism Endangers America', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 89, no. 6, November/December 2010, pp. 133-140.

³⁷ Allison Stanger, *One Nation Under Contract: The Outsourcing of American Power and the Future of Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), ch. 4.

As touched upon above, the militarized quality of much American diplomacy significantly impacts not only how American diplomats represent the United States, but also who is seen as representing the United States abroad. For virtually all countries, this is obvious: ambassadors represent them. However, some authors have argued that in recent decades US military commanders (or, as they are now known, 'theater combatant commanders'), operating an expanding network of military bases around the world, have acquired representative significance. The most controversial of these commands was the US military command in Africa (AFRICOM).³⁸ In short, the United States' most important representatives abroad are not its ambassadors, but its regional military commanders and possibly, in certain countries, its CIA station chiefs. *Washington Post* reporter Dana Priest argued that well before the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, the US government had grown increasingly dependent on its military to carry out its foreign policy. The growing reliance on 'special forces' was also tied to these developments. Priest claimed that even before the 2001 Afghanistan War, teams of special forces were operating in 125 countries.³⁹ The United States' military involvement in Afghanistan, which started in 2001, reinforced this view, as did the unexpected longevity of the Iraq War. For example, highly publicized congressional hearings involved joint appearances by Commanding General David Petraeus and US Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker, but there was little doubt that congressmen and the media were primarily interested in what Petraeus had to say, despite the fact that the US Embassy in Baghdad was the largest in the world.⁴⁰

In sum, while the United States has a relatively strong commitment to public diplomacy, arguably a form of soft power, the balance of evidence suggests that — at least since the beginnings of the Cold War in the late 1940s — the United States has an entrenched and dominant national security culture and a comparatively weak diplomatic culture, and that this national security culture has a tendency to prefer hard power to soft power policy instruments.

A Preference for Bilateral over Multilateral Diplomacy

The fourth distinguishing characteristic of American diplomacy is the United States' preference for bilateral over multilateral diplomacy. Multilateral diplomacy here refers to the UN–international organization variety as distinct from military

³⁸ See Symposium on 'The Troubled Rise of AFRICOM', *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 30, no. 1 April 2009.

³⁹ Dana Priest, *The Mission: Waging War and Keeping Peace with America's Military* (New York: Norton, 2003), pp. 16-17. For earlier hints of the region-wide diplomatic scope of high-profile regional commanders, such as Admiral Anthony Zinni, see James Risen and Benjamin Weiser, 'Before Bombing, Omens and Fears', *New York Times*, 9 January 1999.

⁴⁰ On the massive US Embassy in Baghdad, see Jane C. Loeffler, 'Fortress America', *Foreign Policy*, September/October 2007, pp. 54-57.

alliances such as NATO.⁴¹ In the Realist view, great powers are thought typically to engage in alliance formation, such as NATO and the Warsaw Pact, as an intrinsic part of the global balance of power, and to engage with international organizations, such as the UN, only under very favourable terms, such as having a permanent, veto-protected seat on the UN Security Council. Also in the Realist view, small and middle powers tend to prefer multilateral diplomacy because it gives them a seat at the table rather than because they have an inherent interest in advancing international cooperation.

It is perhaps ironic that US President Woodrow Wilson emerged on the world scene at the end of the First World War attacking the 'old' bilateral method as secretive and war-producing, while advocating the virtues of the 'new' multilateral method as democratic and peace-inducing.⁴² Ever since Wilson's failed attempts to get the United States to join the League of Nations in 1919, the United States has been seen as generally wary of multilateral diplomacy, except where the United States is calling the shots. Thus, following the Second World War, the United States emerged as the paramount Western power, and it heavily influenced the creation of a liberal post-war international order that involved a wide range of institutional structures and methods, first at the UN and later at NATO.⁴³ But, as argued above, the United States protected its interests through such safeguards as the veto in the security-oriented UN Security Council and a weighted voting system in the finance-oriented Bretton Woods institutions.

The further irony is that a US president contributed so much to the creation of the multilateral norm only to see the United States fail to support it. US ambivalence, even hostility, towards this brand of multilateralism has continued ever since, with Republican congressmen generally leading the charge and giving, as argued below, the misleading impression that the United States rejected multilateral diplomacy altogether.⁴⁴ This impression was often reinforced at the UN itself.

⁴¹ I distinguish between the UN, a multilateral organization, and NATO, an international alliance, on the grounds that *multilateral diplomacy* typically refers to relations among three or more states at permanent or ad hoc international conferences. An *alliance* refers to 'a treaty entered into by two or more states to engage in cooperative military action in specified circumstances'; see G.R. Berridge and Alan James, *A Dictionary of Diplomacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2nd edition, 2003), pp. 176-177 and p. 8. For my further views on multilateral diplomacy, see Geoffrey Wiseman, 'Norms and Diplomacy: The Diplomatic Underpinnings of Multilateralism', in James P. Muldoon Jr *et al.* (eds.), *The New Dynamics of Multilateralism: Diplomacy, International Organizations, and Global Governance* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2011), pp. 5-22.

⁴² Wilson possibly concluded that this argument was the only way to get the American people to move away from isolationism and to become involved more permanently in the messy business of international relations and diplomacy. See also Nicolson, *Diplomacy*; Harold Nicolson, *The Evolution of Diplomacy* (New York: Collier Books, [1954] 1966); and Sasson Sofer, 'Old and New Diplomacy: A Debate Revisited', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1988, pp. 195-211.

⁴³ G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁴⁴ For the views of a former British ambassador to the UN on the 'distinctly ambivalent' US attitude towards international organizations, see David Hannay, 'Negotiating Multilaterally: The Advantages and

For example, in the 1970s, US permanent representative Daniel Patrick Moynihan (justifiably) rebuked the UN General Assembly in very critical terms over the odious Zionism Is Racism resolution; in the 1980s, President Reagan's UN ambassador, Jeane Kirkpatrick, attacked the General Assembly's anti-Americanism; and in the 1990s, conservative Republican Senator Jesse Helms famously assailed the UN for alleged cronyism, waste and anti-Americanism.

More recently, President George W. Bush made a term appointment (that is, an appointment not approved by the Senate) of one of the staunchest public critics of the UN: John Bolton.⁴⁵ This appointment was seen by many as a deliberate provocation and as yet another expression of conservative resentment of any hint that the United States' sovereignty was limited by the UN. The neo-conservatism of the Bush administration and its supporters tapped into this tradition of resentment. Many critics saw the administration's approach to the UN during the Iraq crisis as the most polemical and sustained attack on multilateralism since 1919. While some aspects of the neo-conservative critique of the UN system were merited, many were not. The Bush administration seemed unable to understand (or, as I am arguing, was unwilling to admit publicly) that the United States gained much from the UN being located in the United States and that the United States exerted enormous influence over the UN through both its budget contributions and its permanent membership in the Security Council, where it enjoys *primus inter pares* status. In the lead up to the Iraq invasion, the Bush administration harshly criticized the UN for years of inaction against Iraq, directing especially blistering public criticism towards France, Germany and others that opposed war in Iraq, as well as towards UN weapons inspectors who were working to find Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.⁴⁶ For many, even when the United States did go to the UN, it was seen to do so only begrudgingly and for self-serving reasons. President Bush's General Assembly speech of 12 September 2002, UN Security Council Resolution 1441, and Secretary of State Colin Powell's February 2003 presentation to the Security Council were generally seen in this light. Much of the world was dismayed by Washington's apparently dismissive approach to the UN over Iraq. Thus, when President Bush made comments suggesting the irrelevance and impending demise of the UN if it failed to act (in support of the US position) against Iraq, the remarks were widely interpreted as further evidence of the neo-conservatives' longstanding rejection of international organizations *per se*.

In Bush's second term, however, his administration toned down its rhetoric and turned to the UN for support in Iraq and, under Condoleezza Rice as Secretary of State, in several policy areas. Even if the United States' return to the UN

Disadvantages of the US Approach', in Solomon and Quinney, *American Negotiating Behavior*, esp. p. 272.

⁴⁵ See John R. Bolton, *Surrender Is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations and Abroad* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2007).

⁴⁶ Hans Blix, *Disarming Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004).

was only tactical, it is significant that the administration felt compelled to legitimize at least some of its actions in terms of diplomatic culture's norm of multilateralism.

What was radical about John Bolton's term as the United States' permanent representative to the UN was the active pursuit of his view of an international order that was dominated by the United States and at odds with Truman's 'embedded liberalism' (in Ruggie's phrase).⁴⁷ In other words, this was less about opposition to UN multilateralism as a form of diplomatic engagement than it was about opposition to multipolarity in favour of a unipolar vision of world order.⁴⁸ Historian Stephen Schlesinger argues that George W. Bush rejected the UN more at the declaratory level than the substantive (a view that is generally supported by David Bosco in this issue).⁴⁹ According to Schlesinger, the United States, even when Bolton was its representative, used the UN for its own purposes and sometimes quite skilfully.⁵⁰ In short, even under conservative administrations, the United States exploits multilateral diplomacy while often publicly denying multilateralism's utility.

Still, the Bush administration had a clear preference for the bilateral over the multilateral method, as evidenced by its decision to withdraw the ratification by Bill Clinton's administration of US membership in the International Criminal Court (ICC). However, in this case the United States not only rejected the ICC (the *multilateral* method), but followed up with an extraordinary worldwide diplomatic effort to sign *bilateral* treaties with as many countries as possible so as to undercut the ICC by ensuring that other countries would not prosecute Americans under the ICC statute.⁵¹ Further evidence for this claim is seen in the United States' assertive negotiation of bilateral, rather than multilateral, free-trade agreements. In other words, the United States during the Bush years tended to use its diplomatic leverage by utilizing multiple bilateral relationships, rather than battle it out in multilateral forums where it was outnumbered and could be outmanoeuvred by smaller states. A related irony, or perhaps blind spot, in the American conception of diplomacy is that even those Americans who think that diplomacy is a bad thing tend to conceptualize the world in terms of bilateral relations — for example, US–Russia, US–China or US–Mexico — seemingly unaware of the role that diplomats play in conducting these relations.

The Obama administration signalled *inter alia* a more liberal internationalist view of the UN by appointing Susan Rice as Obama's ambassador and by its

⁴⁷ John Gerard Ruggie, 'International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order', *International Organization*, vol. 36, no. 2, spring 1982, pp. 379-415.

⁴⁸ I am grateful to a reviewer for this point.

⁴⁹ David Bosco, 'Course Corrections: The Obama Administration at the United Nations,' *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 6 nos. 3-4, pp. 335-349.

⁵⁰ Stephen C. Schlesinger, 'Bush's Stealth United Nations Policy', *World Policy Journal*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2008, pp. 1-9.

⁵¹ Solomon and Quinney, *American Negotiating Behavior*, p. 37.

policy theme that the United States needs the UN.⁵² These actions were reinforced by warm and high-profile visits to the UN by President Obama himself.

Ideological Underpinnings: Not Talking to the Enemy

A fifth distinguishing characteristic of American diplomacy is its strong ideological grounding. Perhaps the best example of this ideological base (one that Americans would generally not acknowledge or even recognize about themselves) is that since the nation's rise to global pre-eminence approximately 100 years ago, and unlike many comparable Western countries, the United States has chosen to isolate diplomatically for long periods states that it deemed adversarial, and has required those states to meet preconditions before it will formally engage them.⁵³ Thus, the United States has shunned the diplomatic norm of engaging adversarial states through diplomacy's many bilateral and multilateral channels, and has generally refused for extended periods to establish formal diplomatic relations with such states. This behaviour, which is essentially a US tradition, is the main reason why I do not include the idea of near-universal diplomatic representation as one of the United States' distinctive diplomatic qualities. In the twentieth century, the United States declined to establish formal diplomatic relations for many years with the Soviet Union (1917-1933), the People's Republic of China (1949-1972), Cuba under Castro (1959-1977) and Vietnam (1975-1994). This approach has also been applied to Libya under Gaddafi (1969-2003) and to Iran (1979-present) and North Korea (1948-present). In all cases, there is a strong ideological component to these relationships, hinting that the key moment in this tradition of refusing to talk to the enemy (reinforcing an already inherent general distrust of diplomacy) was the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia that pitted the communist against the liberal-democratic systems. At the same time, in almost all cases, US domestic lobbies and émigré groups were influential in pressuring the administration to avoid engagement (this is especially notable in the case of Cuba, but pertains also to China, Vietnam, North Korea and Iran), which points to the influence of domestic politics on American diplomacy. Another aspect that underscores this tradition of non-engagement as 'American' is that it does not hold for the Europeans. They, in contrast, have generally accepted revolutionary governments as the controllers of new states, continuing their diplomatic relations or at least (re-)establishing them earlier than the United States.⁵⁴

⁵² For example, see 'Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, US Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the World Affairs Council of Oregon, Portland, Oregon, 11 February 2011'. On the significance of Rice's appointment, see Thomas Weiss, 'Towards a Third Generation of International Institutions: Obama's UN Policy', *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2009, pp. 141-162.

⁵³ This section draws on Wiseman, 'Engaging the Enemy', pp. 213-234. See also Charles A. Kupchan, *How Enemies Become Friends: The Sources of Stable Peace* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁵⁴ The Europeans generally avoided the legal problem by recognizing the *state* rather than the *government*. On the general topic of US relations with 'rogue' states, see the work of Miroslav Nincic — for

The neo-conservatives under George W. Bush held to this tradition — even extending it to include regime change — and in so doing cast diplomacy aside, appearing to squander the elaborate toolbox of diplomatic instruments that are available for changing such states' behaviour. But this US tradition has not gone unquestioned or unopposed. There have always been Americans seeking to engage rather than to shun and isolate adversarial states — in other words, individuals who favoured an approach subscribing to the norms of diplomatic culture and promoting sustainable diplomacy. Such an approach has been variously supported by liberal US presidents, such as Jimmy Carter, but also by 'traditional' conservatives such as Richard Nixon.

The tradition of refusing to engage adversarial states unless their behaviour changed surfaced during the 2008 presidential race. Republican presidential nominee John McCain generally opposed the idea that the United States should talk to and fully engage adversarial states, while Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama generally supported the idea. Here, again, we see a broad pattern of liberals tending to support diplomatic engagement and conservatives tending to oppose it. However, it should be noted that the Bush administration agreed to talks with Iranian officials to discuss US allegations of Iranian involvement with Iraqi militias that were fighting against US forces in Iraq. In addition, US interests in Iran have throughout this period been represented by the Swiss Embassy in Tehran. It is quite possible that some discreet communications have taken place via the Swiss.

Obama's US electoral victory signalled openness to the possibility of breaking with the tradition of non-engagement until preconditions are met. In his inaugural address, Obama told leaders 'who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West' that the United States 'will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist'. In its first few months, the Obama administration made public overtures to Cuba, Syria, Iran and North Korea.

President Obama thus came to office promising a new direction for US foreign policy, dissimilar to that of his predecessor. He offered a cooperative model for how the United States would relate to the world as a whole (its approach to diplomacy in general) and how it would relate specifically to adversarial states (its approach to the norm of engaging the enemy). As Obama's Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton affirmed the administration's 'willingness to talk' to 'foes and would-be foes'. However, over the first two years, the new administration's conception of 'direct engagement' with Iran appears to have meant Washington-based negotiators would meet with their Tehran-based counterparts, perhaps in some third country. It has not included diplomatic culture's norm of continuous dialogue, which would involve the exchange of diplomats who are resident in each country's capitals.

example, 'The Logic of Positive Engagement: Dealing with Renegade Regimes', *International Studies Perspectives*, vol. 7, 2006, pp. 321-341.

Having ignored, or, more accurately, publicly decried many of diplomacy's norms under George W. Bush, the United States is rediscovering diplomacy and its engagement precepts under Obama. As US president, Obama has so far hewed to a willingness to engage the enemy despite attendant risks, a stance much like that of former US President Jimmy Carter. The central policy dilemma for those in the Obama administration who would engage the enemy is how to design a long-term vision that will resolve the Iranian and North Korean nuclear issues peacefully — and these aspects of Obama's policy have come under the influence of the hard-power Democrats in the administration.

A Significantly Higher Proportion of Politically Appointed Ambassadors

The sixth distinguishing feature of American diplomacy (one that might just as easily fit under characteristic (2) — that is, a relatively high penetration of domestic politics in foreign policy) is a strong attachment to the idea that the United States should have a significantly higher proportion of politically appointed ambassadors compared with other Western nations. After a presidential election, all US ambassadors are required to submit letters of resignation, theoretically opening up nearly 190 ambassadorial vacancies for the new president to fill. Typically, the incoming president appoints senior officers of the foreign service ('career' appointees) to roughly 70 per cent of these positions, and persons from outside the foreign service ('political' appointees) to the other 30 per cent. New states often have no reserve of professional diplomats to call upon, and revolutionary or authoritarian states generally distrust professional diplomats as representing the old order, so the United States is far from alone in this practice. The practice does stand, however, in sharp contrast to that of most Western countries, whose percentage of politically appointed ambassadors is very small.

In the United States, the politically appointed, or 'non-career', ambassadors have traditionally been of three main varieties:

Political heavyweights: This group consists of senior figures from US political life and government who are thought to bring some heft to the position. Members of this group, who derive their influence in good measure from their connections to the president, have included such notable political figures as Averell Harriman, who was appointed to the Soviet Union during the Second World War, and more recently Howard Baker, whom George W. Bush appointed to Tokyo. Also falling into this group are *special envoys*, who reside at home and travel abroad on designated assignments — for example, former Senator George Mitchell, who was appointed by President Bill Clinton in the 1990s to help broker a political settlement in Northern Ireland and then by President Obama to facilitate Middle East peace. Overall, this kind of non-career appointment is defensible, as appointees typically combine diplomatic competence (even if not professionally trained as diplomats) and political clout.

Experts: People in this group are nominated for their specialized knowledge of an issue, country, or region. Some are chosen from outside government, as was the case with Edwin Reischauer of Harvard University, who was appointed by President John Kennedy in the early 1960s to improve the then-poor US–Japan relations. Experts with long government or military experience, but drawn from outside the State Department, also fit into this category. Successful examples are James R. Lilley, a Chinese-speaking former CIA officer who was appointed to China in the late 1980s by President George H.W. Bush.

Donor ambassadors: These are individuals who are nominated largely on the basis of party and campaign donations. These donor ambassadors are often nominees with no special skills or background for representing the United States in the country concerned. While some donor ambassadors have proved to be effective US representatives (for example, Robert Strauss in Moscow and Ronald Spogli in Rome), others have been simply ineffective or have caused acute embarrassment to the United States. In such cases, US efforts to win over public opinion in the host country start with a distinct handicap and generally face an uphill struggle. This form of non-career appointment, seen as distinctively American and rare in most comparable foreign services, is the one that causes American diplomacy the greatest reputational damage.⁵⁵

Early on, Obama indicated that he would appoint professional diplomats to ambassadorships ‘wherever possible’ and that only ‘some’ of his appointments would be political. However, by mid-2009 the Obama administration was being criticized, in the words of one reporter, for ‘continuing the tradition of handing out ambassadorships to major campaign donors with no experience in foreign affairs’ and was on track to exceed the 30 per cent historical norm for political appointees.⁵⁶ By mid-2011, the American Foreign Service Association recorded that 36 per cent of the Obama administration’s ambassadorial appointments were political.⁵⁷ This is a regrettable trend, and one that appears to underscore the United States’ continued unwillingness to entrust the nation’s diplomatic representation to professional diplomats, but it is also one that — if left unchecked — is likely to harm the United States’ self-image and its reputation for rewarding merit over personal connections. This observation is especially pertinent concerning the indefensible donor ambassador category.

⁵⁵ For a succinct discussion with helpful references to the literature, see Jean-Robert Leguey-Feilleux, *The Dynamics of Diplomacy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2009), pp. 141-142. For specific criticisms of US political appointees, including by non-US diplomats, see Solomon and Quinney, *American Negotiating Behavior*, for example pp. 239, 275 and 276.

⁵⁶ Nicholas Kravev, ‘Career Diplomats Protest Obama Appointment’, *The Washington Times*, 10 July 2009.

⁵⁷ A full list can be found on the American Foreign Service Association’s website, online at <http://www.afsa.org/ambassadorlist.aspx> (accessed 30 July 2011). In March 2011, the figure had risen to 40 per cent.

A Direct, Low-Context Negotiating Style

The seventh and final distinguishing characteristic of American diplomacy is a cultural disposition towards a direct, low-context negotiating style, a style that has been accentuated politically by the United States' hegemonic status over the past half century. According to Raymond Cohen's account of the distinction between a high- and a low-context negotiating style, a *high-context negotiating style* is characterized by an emphasis on process and relationship-building and on indirect, implicit and non-verbal forms of communication, and is typically practised in older, more traditional societies, such as Japan and China. For such communally minded cultures, Cohen argues, 'negotiation is less about solving problems... than about attending to a relationship', and 'it is not a conflict that is resolved but a relationship that is mended'.⁵⁸ In contrast, a *low-context negotiating style* focuses on results rather than relationships, is direct and explicit in communication preferences, and is typically practised in newer societies in which the individual is valued more than community, such as the United States. For me, this characteristic is not only about how one negotiates on behalf of one's country, but, more broadly, about how one represents one's country — a broader rubric that includes negotiations. The role of negotiation in diplomacy is overstated in the literature. As a practical matter, diplomats spend a relatively small amount of time negotiating, in the sense of sitting around a table hammering out the details of a treaty or agreement. Solomon and Quinney characterize American negotiating behaviour in terms of four types: the businesslike negotiator; the legalistic negotiator; the moralistic negotiator; and the superpower, or hegemonic, negotiator.⁵⁹ This is a helpful typology, but I would argue that these four types are generally presented in a low-context fashion.

Support for this low-context style was a feature of the George W. Bush administration, which with some notable exceptions (such as Colin Powell as Secretary of State) displayed little patience for diplomatic niceties and protocol, seeing in high-context diplomacy the obfuscations, duplicity and issue avoidance that had caused many Americans since the nation's founding to distrust diplomacy. US Vice-President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and UN Ambassador John Bolton all made public statements that support this contention. In contrast, the Obama administration, led by the president himself, has introduced a moderate and considered style that resonates with Ernest Satow's famous equation of diplomacy with 'tact'.

⁵⁸ Cohen, *Negotiating Across Cultures*, p. 69. For a conceptual discussion of the high–low context distinction and the earlier research on which it is based, see pp. 36–43.

⁵⁹ Solomon and Quinney, *American Negotiating Behavior*, esp. ch. 2, 'The Four-Faceted Negotiator'.

Conclusions and Further Considerations

This article's original purpose was twofold: to provide evidence that there is indeed a distinctively American diplomacy; and to offer, through analysis of the seven characteristics that mark this distinctiveness, a working framework with which to evaluate any US administration's relationship to diplomacy as the nation's interests and identity evolve. What has emerged from this analysis, however, is an intriguing point related to what I identify here as an American distrust of diplomacy — that is, that while the United States has in practice accepted many diplomatic norms and practices, it remains reluctant to acknowledge the fact. In other words, distrust of diplomacy is accompanied by a need to be seen to distrust it. This was most evident during the George W. Bush administration's years. In contrast, the Obama administration — both through the president and his secretary of state — has been willing to accept, even to applaud, diplomacy's potential contribution.

While the distinctiveness of the seven characteristics can most certainly be debated, their analysis nonetheless invites us to consider some difficult questions, such as their cumulative effect over time, their sustainability and their variation from one presidential administration to another. In addition, as stated above, the analysis can be used as a framework for evaluating past, present and future US administrations' relationships to diplomacy. In terms of theories of international relations, the analysis suggests that Neo-Realist and other positivist conceptions of diplomacy (as essentially static and universalist, rather than evolving and particular) are simplistic and overlook a great deal that distinguishes national diplomatic cultures and styles that affect international affairs. The United States is not immune from this generalization: as American interests and identities evolve, so too will its diplomacy, including the specific characteristics discussed here. Traditional Realists have grounds for believing that American diplomacy as characterized here fails to achieve its objective of advancing the country's national interests. And traditional Liberal internationalists have grounds for doubting that American diplomacy promotes international cooperation as much as they think it should. Moreover, the conclusion that the United States in practice accepts diplomatic norms and practices while remaining reluctant to acknowledge them poses challenges for Constructivist norm theory. In diplomacy, we seem to have a set of norms that are not only taken for granted but actively deprecated by one of the most important actors that is uncomfortably bound by them. This raises interesting questions not only about the reproduction of such norms, but also how they continue to be effective in the face of such ambivalence.

It is hard to argue against the democratic impulse underlying the high degree of domestic political influence over US foreign policy and diplomacy. Yet from Nicolson onwards, non-Americans (as well as some US diplomats) have noted how US negotiators exploit this characteristic to secure better deals for the United States, leaving foreign diplomats and negotiators resenting the ploy, as they too

have their domestic audiences to satisfy.⁶⁰ Yet to the extent that consistency and coherence are important features of any country's diplomacy, American domestic influences create a great deal of inconsistency and incoherence.⁶¹ Moreover, growing partisanship in American politics suggests that the United States of the future will lack both the political will and the diplomatic skill that are required to maintain a semblance of global leadership.

While we need to be careful not to assume that the possession of hard power is necessarily a bad and coercive feature of a state's international relations, the United States has often been tempted by the seductions of a *hard-power security culture*, to the detriment of a soft-power diplomatic culture. To put this point another way, the United States has developed a 'national *security system*' in contrast to what Brian Hocking identifies as having arisen in many other countries: a 'national *diplomatic system*'.⁶² The Obama administration came to office suggesting that the balance would be corrected in favour of soft power, but this recalibration in the conceptual compromise known as 'smart power' has been halting and unsure over such issues as troop withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan, what to do about Iran and North Korea, and how to respond to the series of crises in the Middle East in early 2011. A revealing example of how the Obama administration seems torn between hard and soft power is its continued use, carried over from the Bush administration, of the 'all options remain on the table' policy towards Iran (discussed by Esposito and Vahid Gharavi in this issue)⁶³ and other recalcitrant actors, such as Libya. The all-options metaphor is instructive because it implies that diplomatic negotiation is possible, but the essential message is that military force is the ultimate arbiter for the United States.

The Obama administration has by no means ditched bilateral diplomacy that is based on narrower national interests (as seen in the attention given to Sino-US and Russo-US relations and to bilateral trade deals). It has, however, demonstrated a clear rhetorical preference for multilateral diplomacy that is based on wider international interests, most notably at the UN, as personified by its high-profile (and Cabinet-level) permanent representative. It has even claimed

⁶⁰ On 'two-level games', see Robert Putnam, 'Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games', *International Organization*, vol. 42, no. 3, summer 1988. If my argument about the distinctiveness of American diplomacy — especially the relatively high degree of domestic political penetration in foreign policy — has substance, then Putnam's two-level game thesis becomes more a theory about US foreign policy and less a theory about international relations.

⁶¹ On coherence in foreign policy, see Daniel W. Drezner, *Avoiding Trivia: The Role of Strategic Planning in American Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009). For the view of a former US diplomat, see Monteagle Stearns, *Talking to Strangers: Improving American Diplomacy at Home and Abroad* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 59.

⁶² Brian Hocking, 'Conclusion', in Brian Hocking and David Spence (eds.), *Foreign Ministries in the European Union: Integrating Diplomats* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), esp. pp. 5 and 285 (my emphasis).

⁶³ Karin A. Esposito and S. Alaeddin Vahid Gharavi, 'Transformational Diplomacy: US Tactics for Change in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2004-2006,' *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 6 nos. 3-4, pp. 319-334.

(via Secretary of State Clinton) that the time has arrived for diplomatic arrangements of a third, *transnational* kind, involving non-state, global civil-society actors. Yet as a superpower, the United States will have a need for, and indeed is in a position to exercise, all three dimensions of diplomacy. The question is how it will balance all three.⁶⁴ The evidence that a judicious balance will be found is mildly encouraging so far, differentiating the Obama administration from that of Bush, with its heavy investment in bilateralism. Still, as argued earlier, there is evidence that the United States' multilateral anti-diplomacy under Bush was more bark than bite.

Why the United States, since its rise as a world power, would so adamantly refuse to engage its enemies is not easy to explain. This characteristic, which is shared by few other democratically inclined countries, may well have its roots in the American view that diplomacy is hardly likely to make any difference with such recalcitrant adversaries. This sceptical view of diplomacy is in turn reinforced by domestic political pressure, in the form of overwhelming demands from 'conservative America' not to appease, or appear to appease, any known or perceived hostile adversary, and perhaps also from 'liberal America', which does not want to see human rights go unprotected. The United States was able to maintain this policy so long as it was a preponderant world power, but it may be less able to do so as it faces likely challenges to its post-war geostrategic, economic and socio-cultural dominance. Perhaps, as Paul Sharp argues in this issue,⁶⁵ the United States, as a declining superpower, will have more need for diplomacy and diplomats to manage that decline, which may also mean diplomatic engagement of its most hostile adversaries.

The US characteristic of having a relatively high percentage of politically appointed ambassadorships carries mixed blessings for the overall quality and effectiveness of American diplomacy. However, this conclusion would be more positive if US presidents dispensed totally with the donor ambassador category, since that is the category that causes the greatest damage to the United States' diplomatic persona and reputation. A clear distinction must be drawn between political heavyweights and respected experts, on the one hand, and lightweight party donors, on the other. The present trends, however, suggest that this is unlikely to happen. This article thus concludes that Americans are comparatively more sceptical about entrusting their diplomacy entirely to a separate class of trained professional diplomats who are often seen as being out of touch with American values.

⁶⁴ For a conceptual exploration of the three types of diplomacy, see Geoffrey Wiseman, 'Polylateralism: Diplomacy's Third Dimension', *Public Diplomacy Magazine*, vol. 4, 2010, pp. 24-39, available online at www.publicdiplomacymagazine.org.

⁶⁵ Paul Sharp, 'Obama, Clinton and the Diplomacy of Change,' *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 6 nos. 3-4, pp. 393-411.

One of the problems with America's direct, no-nonsense, low-context approach to diplomacy is that it conveys a sense of impatience, often bordering on perceived bullying. While many US professional diplomats have been known to conduct themselves with exquisite tact — for example, Tom Pickering, Ryan Crocker, Christopher Hill and Nicholas Burns — there is a general perception that US diplomats, notably those with political connections, are yet to learn the art of quiet diplomacy. This art may be learned as the United States' standing declines, or at least as the United States comes under increasing challenge from rising players in the international system.

At the very least, American diplomacy would benefit from an assessment that is based on these seven characteristics and the ways in which they cumulatively affect how others see the United States and how Americans see themselves. What emerges here is that an anti-diplomacy theme appears to unite all the other characteristics of American diplomacy. Americans have been historically suspicious of diplomatic notions such as balance of power and *realpolitik*, and they have a strong attachment to democratic principles that they believe should be extended to diplomatic practices. As a result, they rely on hard power rather than soft power, or diplomatic persuasion, and have a preference for bilateral rather than multilateral relationships. In the US approach to diplomacy, enemies cannot be trusted and negotiated with, and negotiations and representation should not be left to professionals who are disconnected from the democratic political system. Moreover, diplomatic interactions should be direct and to the point, and free of diplomatic pretences and encumbrances. Yet the ultimate paradox that emerges is that the United States is tied much more closely to the world diplomatic system — with its myriad norms and practices — than it wishes to concede.

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